

EXPLORING THE CONTINUITY OF SPORTS PARTICIPATION:
THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY SPORT CLUBS
IN THE SPORT DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

LAUREN WOLMAN

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Abstract

Athletes are often faced with various life and athletic transitions, which can lead to a decline or even a drop-out in sport participation (Freysinger & Ray, 1994; Lim, Warner, Dixon, Berg, Kim, & Newhouse-Bailey, 2011; Lunn, 2010; Tammelin, Näyhä, Hills & Järvelin, 2003, Wyllemann & Lavalley, 2004). In Canada, the most significant decline in sport participation occurs between the ages of 15 to 24 years (Statistics Canada, 2012), when many graduate from secondary and/or post-secondary education. The purpose of this research was to explore the role of community sport clubs in facilitating sport participation in the sport of rugby union in a large Canadian city, with a specific focus on the transition from youth to adult sport. Two qualitative studies were conducted which examined a) athletes' perspectives of the psychosocial factors that influenced initial involvement and continued participation on a community sport club and b) administrators' perspectives of the role of community clubs in facilitating sport development and the continuity of sport participation into adulthood. Findings demonstrated that early exposure and access to sport can increase athletes' awareness and initial involvement with community clubs and strong school-club partnerships can facilitate athletes' continued involvement in structured competitive sport. To build sport commitment and club loyalty, strategies should be implemented to ensure seamless transitions between junior and senior sport and programs should provide a balance between the competitive and social elements of sport. Lastly, providing flexible programming and opportunities for athletes to transition into leadership roles can extend athletes' lifelong involvement in sport. Findings are discussed in the context of practical implications (e.g., community sport clubs' strategic planning) and future research directions (e.g., examining different sporting environments).

Dedication

“Deeds Not Words”

- Charlton Park Rugby Football Club

This paper is dedicated to all the community sport club administrators and coaches who pretend to work diligently at their full-time jobs, when really, they are spending endless hours ensuring that their athletes are provided with the best opportunities play the sport they love. Your unconditional commitment is the backbone of sport development.

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Introduction

Green's (2005) proposed normative theory of sport development revisited a pyramid model of sport development, with mass-participation forming the fundamental base of the model, in turn supporting the development of competitive and elite athletes. Green recommends that effective sport development requires increased sport participation, specifically among children and youth, coupled with improved competitive standards. In addition, she suggests sport development programs should address three key areas: athlete recruitment/entrance, retention, and transition/advancement. However, maintaining athlete involvement in sports can be challenging for sport administrators at all levels, as athletes are often faced with various life and athletic transitions, which can lead to a decrease in, or even drop-out from sport participation due to lack of time, availability of programming, personal commitments (e.g., family, and work status), socio-economic status, and educational attainment (Freysinger & Ray, 1994; Lim, Warner, Dixon, Berg, Kim, & Newhouse-Bailey, 2011; Lunn, 2010; Tammelin, N  yh  , Hills & J  rvelin, 2003; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). In Canada, sport participation over the past 20 years has been decreasing across all age groups and genders, with the biggest decline amongst 15-24 year olds (Statistics Canada, 2012). One of the most significant life transitions for athletes is graduation from formal education, which can greatly influence continued involvement in sport (Lim et al., 2011; Lunn, 2010; Tammelin et al., 2003; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004).

It has been suggested that community sport clubs are valued partners in the provision of sport programming across a lifespan (Collins & Buller, 2000; De Knop, Theeboom, Martelaer, Puymbroeck, Wittock, & Wylleman, 1995; Eime & Payne, 2009; Lim et al., 2011). Community clubs are viewed as "places where young people are socialized into sport competitions and, as such, form the basic foundation unit for talent development and identification" (Kirk &

MacPhail, 2003, p. 24). Although community sport clubs can vary in structure, generally they are “led, organized, supported or enabled by community volunteers and institutions” (Canadian Centre for Ethics and Sport, 2008, p. viii). Past research suggests exposure to community club sport in childhood is associated with participation in sport and physical activity in adulthood (Richards, Williams, Poulton & Reeder, 2007; Tammelin et al., 2003). In addition, partnerships between community sport clubs and schools have been highlighted as an effective pathway for young athletes to continue participating following graduation from formal education (Collins & Buller, 2000; Eime & Payne, 2009). However, socio-cultural factors such as the built, natural, and social environments can influence participation (Edwards & Tsouros, 2006), as there are many barriers to sport and physical activity participation amongst those living in urban environments, which include fear of crime, road safety and the lack of accessible and affordable sporting facilities and programs (Edwards & Tsouros, 2006; Gordon-Larsen, Nelson, Page, & Popkin, 2006; Moore, Jilcott, Shores, Evenson, Brownson, & Novick, 2010). Several models of sport participation and development (i.e., *Development Model for Sport Participation*, Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2011; *Development Model of Transitions Faced by Athletes*, Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004; *Long-Term Athlete Development* strategy, Canadian Sport Institute, 2014) provide insight into the factors that influence young athletes’ entrance and continued participation in sport, yet these models were developed drawing largely upon research among high-performing athletes and may not reflect broad-based lifelong sport participation, which includes continued participation in structured competitive sports. In addition, there is lack of research on how sport providers such as community sport clubs, support pathways for sport development.

The purpose of this research was to explore the role of community sport clubs in facilitating sport participation in the sport of rugby union in a large Canadian city, with a specific focus on the transition from youth to adult sport. Two qualitative studies were conducted, examining this question from the perspectives of both athletes and club administrators. Specifically, the first study explored athletes' perspectives of the psychosocial factors that influenced initial involvement and continued participation on a community sport club. The second study explored administrators' perspectives of the role of community sport clubs in facilitating sport development and the continuity of sport participation into adulthood.

Literature Review

Green's Position on Sport Development

Green (2005) proposed the importance of the pyramid analogy for sport development, whereby high-performance sport is dependent on broad based participation and improving competitive standards, which is delivered through effective recruitment/entrance, retention and transition/advancement programs. Green argues recruitment and entrance into sport is greatly influenced by opportunities for participation and individuals who encourage athletes' involvement (e.g., parents, coaches, teachers, peers). She presents the undermanning theory, which suggests that greater opportunities to participate in a team (e.g., being selected as a starter, having a key role within the team) can increase an athlete's commitment, emphasizing the importance of program planners considering how programs are structured to increase participation (e.g., large community sport clubs may consider providing multiple teams). In order to increase athletes' commitment to programs, athletes must find value in participating; therefore, effective retention strategies focused on enhancing motivation, encouraging

socialization and building commitment are essential. Lastly, Green proposes the importance of transitioning/advancement strategies, as lack of such opportunities may lead athletes to leave their sport. More specifically, there needs to be pathways for athletes to progress into higher levels of competition and the transition between these levels needs to be supported. As a player goes through an athletic transition to a higher level team (e.g., a new age group or competition level), they are often challenged with re-socialization due to new team mates, coaching and perceived expectations. Green highlights the lack of research in this area and suggests that further research be conducted to understand how athletes can be supported to successfully transition between teams.

In line with Green's position on sport development, this literature review discusses factors that have been found to influence children and youth's sport participation, and continuity of sport participation into adulthood, as well as the role of community sport clubs in supporting sport development.

Exposure and Access to Sport in Early Childhood

A child's entrance, life-long commitment, and achievement in sport can be influenced by exposure and access to sport in early childhood, which can include, parental involvement, a family's socioeconomic position, and opportunities for children to be involved in sport can influence initial and continued involvement (Clark, 2008; Côté, 1999; Green 2005; Hirvensalo & Lintunen, 2011; Holt, Kingsley, Tink, & Scherer, 2011; Jakobsson, Lundvall, Redelius & Engström, 2012; Lunn, 2010; Richards, Williams, Poulton & Reeder, 2007; Santos, Esculcas & Mota, 2004; Tammelin, Näyhä, Hills & Järvelin, 2003; White & McTeer, 2012; Yang, Telama & Laakso, 1996).

With regard to parental involvement, Yang et al. (1996) found that parents' sport and physical activity related attitudes and behaviours were associated with children's sport participation, as individuals learn from observing and modeling behaviour of significant others (Bandura, 1977). In particular, Yang and colleagues found children with active fathers were more likely to participate in sport later in life, with a father's physical activity being particularly influential before a child is 9 years old. Mothers generally motivated their daughters' participation in sport more than sons'; however their role became more significant in single-parent family structures. Although children of single parent families are generally less likely to participate in sports, Yang et al. suggested that active single mothers can greatly influence their child's participation, especially when the father is passive or absent from the child's life. This may be due to the mother "trying to compensate for the deficient of the father" (Yang et al., 1996, p. 286).

Early opportunities to engage in community club sport can also increase the likelihood of continuing to participate in adulthood (Richards et al., 2007; Tammelin et al., 2003). In the study by Richards et al. (2007), which tracked club participation from childhood to early adulthood, they concluded that those who joined club sport before the age of 7 were more likely to continue participating in sport in their later years. In addition, Jakobsson et al. (2012) conducted a study with youth who participated in club sport in Sweden and suggested that youth who possess a specific disposition to want to play competitive sport, have the cultural and economic means to participate, and have extensive parental involvement, are more likely to continue participating in community sport clubs during late adolescence.

It has been suggested that children who have opportunities to sample a wide range of sports and physical activities during childhood are more likely to continue participating later in

life (Wall & Côté, 2007). The *Development Model for Sport Participation* (DMSP; Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2011) proposes that most children experience the sampling years between ages 6-12 years. During this stage, it is important for parents to provide opportunities for children to enjoy sport, which includes increasing access and encouraging children to sample a wide range of activities that are fun and enjoyable, as the sampling years are generally the foundation for continuing onto the recreational years or a springboard for advancing to the specialization and investment years.

However, a family's socioeconomic status (e.g., parents' education, income) can also be a strong determinant of a child's participation in sport and physical activity (Clark, 2008; Holt et al., 2011; Santos et al., 2004). Children from families of higher social status are more likely to participate in organized sports than children from lower social classes (Santos et al., 2004). An investigation conducted by Holt et al. (2011) with low-income families, highlighted that many parents are faced with significant time and financial barriers that limited their ability to provide sport participation opportunities for their children. As well, there is an association between the education level of the parent and their child's participation. Children whose parents have a professional or university degree are 60% more likely to participate in organized sports compared with parents who completed only secondary school or do not have a secondary school diploma (Clark, 2008).

In addition, socio-cultural factors such as the built, natural, and social environments can influence participation in sport and physical activity, with past work suggesting fear of crime, road safety and the lack of accessible and affordable sporting facilities and programs, especially for marginalized communities, may act as barriers for participation (Edwards & Tsouros, 2006; Gordon-Larsen, Nelson, Page, & Popkin, 2006). In a study conducted by Moore, Jilcott, Shores,

Evenson, Brownson & Novick 2010, which explored physical activity patterns amongst rural and urban youth and their parents, it was highlighted that cost, distance, transportation and safety were major barriers for parents living in urban areas.

Opportunities for Sport through School Programs

Although early exposure and accessibility to sport have a profound influence on participation, other factors later in youths' development can also influence youths' sport participation and continuity of involvement. Both middle and secondary school provide a broader and less expensive range of sport programs, which open up opportunities for more youth to participate in sport, especially those who come from low socioeconomic backgrounds (White & McTeer, 2012). This is particularly important given various studies suggesting school sport participation influences sport participation later in life (Curtis et al., 1999; Howell & McKenzie, 1987; Tammelin et al., 2003; White & Curtis, 1990). For example, Howell and McKenzie (1987) examined track and field athletes over a 15-year period from 1955 to 1970 and found a relation between participation in athletic programs in secondary school and involvement in sport later in life, suggesting that the socialization skills developed through sport influenced continued participation.

There appear to be conflicting findings regarding the optimal type of sport environment within the education system in order to foster continued participation. White and Curtis (1990) proposed that intramural sports provide students with a positive experience through participation and competition that can influence their continued participation in sport in adulthood, compared with intermural sports, where the emphasis is on outcomes. In contrast, Curtis et al.'s (1999) study found that inter-school (i.e., secondary school) sport experiences were a strong predictor of adult sport involvement, across most age groups and genders. The authors proposed that inter-

school athletes tend to have higher levels of skill, greater interest and knowledge of sport and physical activity, more ego involvement, and more time commitment compared with other students, which may influence their continuity in sport. Recommendations from this research echoed Green's (2005) work on the pyramid model, highlighting the need to increase the number of school-aged children participating in inter-school programs from an early age. However, in Canadian schools, only a limited range of sports programs are available before grade 6, which prevents children from building a commitment to sport (White & McTeer, 2012).

Motivational Considerations

Motivational considerations can be of importance in children and youths' introduction and retention in sport. Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory suggests individuals are driven by intrinsic and extrinsic motives. Intrinsic motivation involves engagement because activities are considered pleasurable or fun, whereas extrinsic motivation involves engagement in sports to gain rewards (e.g., trophies) or recognition (Vallerand & Losier, 1999). As such, Green (2005) suggests administrators must recognize athletes' different motives and build programming that satisfies a range of competencies and interests. Further, Rotter's (1954) social learning theory suggests athletes are motivated by an understanding of the benefits of participating and must see value in engaging in sport and feel that goals are obtainable. Consequently, Green (2005) suggests sports programs need to provide an assortment of programming variations to cater to a wide range of sport motivations such as social interactions, fitness, skill development and play. Allen (2004) also suggests that social opportunities such as making friends, developing close relationships, gaining recognition and social status, motivate athletes to stay involved in sport. Although social opportunities are generally developed by interest and enjoyment in sport, they are also linked to physical ability, as an athlete may require

a certain level of physical competence to experience a sense of belonging, acceptance, social status and popularity. Models of sport participation and development align with findings surrounding children and youths' sport motivation. For example, the DMSP's (Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2011) sampling phase involves high amount of deliberate play, with a focus on fitness and enjoyment, while the early specialization trajectory has been associated with high performance, and there remains a risk that it may lead to decreased enjoyment and drop-out (Fraser-Thomas, Côté & Deakin, 2008; Wall & Côté, 2007).

Life and Athletic Transitions

A key factor often found to negatively influence continued sport participation are life and sport transitions, which can lead to decline or even drop-out in sport participation (Freysinger & Ray, 1994; Lim et al., 2011; Lunn, 2010; Tammelin et al., 2003; Wylleman & Lavalley, 2004). Normative life transitions refer to age-related biological, social and emotional events or changes such as graduating from school, starting a new job, marriage, having children, illness and retirement (Wylleman & Lavalley, 2004). Non-normative life transitions are unexpected and often involuntary events which can impact an individual's life both positively and negatively such as pregnancy, illness or death (Wylleman & Lavalley, 2004). Athletes may also experience normative and non-normative athletic transitions which can affect continued participation; normative athletic transitions include progression from junior to senior level, from high-school to varsity, or regional to national-level competition, and non-normative athletic transitions include season-ending injuries or being cut from a team (Wylleman & Lavalley, 2004).

The significant decline in sport participation and increase in sedentary activities in individuals aged 15-24 years (Physical Activity Council, 2013; Statistics Canada, 2012) appears consistent with individuals' life and athletic transitions into adulthood. Specifically, following

graduation from secondary education, many athletes drop-out of team sports and focus instead on physical activities (e.g., yoga and weight training), or move towards passive participation and spectatorship, which takes away from discretionary time for active participation (Lim et al., 2011; Lunn, 2010; Tammelin, et al., 2003). Factors that may influence decreased participation during transitions include decreased available time and sport programming, increased personal commitments (e.g., family, and work status), socio-economic status, and educational attainment (Freysinger & Ray, 1994; Lim et al., 2011; Lunn, 2010; Tammelin et al., 2003).

Wylleman and Lavalley's (2004) *Development Model of Transitions Faced by Athletes* provides an extended overview of the transitions athletes encounter during sport participation from childhood (age 6 years) to adulthood (age 30+ years). The transitions between vocational levels can often lead to a discontinuation in sport participation, due to lack of support or lack of achievement from the athlete. For example, many athletes discontinue participating in competitive sport following secondary education due to the changing environment and lack of opportunities to play sport at a competitive level. However, athletes who developed a strong self-identity during adolescence (13-18 years) are more likely to successfully transition through sport.

Role of Influencers

Although parents have been shown to have the most influence on an athlete's entrance and commitment to sport, the inter-relationships between athletes and their coaches and peers/teammates can also have a profound influence on continued participation, especially during times of life and athletic transition (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Fraser-Thomas, Côté & Deakin, 2008; Keegan, Spray, Harwood & Lavalley, 2010; Wyllemaan & Lavalley, 2004). For example, there is an association between a coach's behaviour and an athlete's self-perceptions, enjoyment and intrinsic motivation, which may influence their decision to continue into the next

stage of their athletic career (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Wylleman & Lavalée, 2004). Furthermore, Fraser-Thomas et al.'s (2008) study of elite swimmers found that supportive and encouraging peers can greatly influence a young athlete's continued sport participation; however, if the athlete's social development is in conflict with their sport involvement, their commitment and motivation for sport may decrease. While a growing body of literature exists on how parents, coaches and peers influence continued participation in sport, much less is known specifically about their role in supporting athletes during athletic transitions.

The Role of Community Sport Clubs

As life and athletic transitions can threaten an athlete's continued involvement in competitive sport, coaches and sport administrators may provide guidance and encouragement to help young athletes advance to the next stage of participation, as many are unaware of the sport delivery systems outside of the school setting (Lim et al., 2011). It has been suggested that community sport clubs are a valued partner in the provision of sport programming and provide athletes with an effective pathway for continued participation in organized sport, particularly following graduation from formal education, and among individuals who want to remain competitive and social (Collins & Buller, 2000; De Knop, Theeboom, De Martelaer, Van Puymbroeck, Wittock, & Wylleman, 1995; Eime & Payne, 2009; Lim et al., 2011).

The Canadian Sport Institute's (2014) *Long-Term Athlete Development* (LTAD) model also proposes that community sport clubs, coupled with recreation centres, schools, colleges and universities provide athletes with the opportunity to continue participating in sport. Specifically, the LTAD outlines a 7-stage framework focused on physical literacy, sport excellence and lifelong physical activity and health. In the *active for life* stage, athletes are encouraged to continue participation through two sub-streams: a) *competitive for life*, which focuses on a path

of continued sport participation in competitive leagues at community and regional levels, and b) *fit for life* focuses on a path of physical fitness and maintenance, with enjoyable physical activity at the recreational level. However, there is lack of insight into how sport agencies such as community sport clubs can facilitate these pathways.

Eime and Payne (2009) explored the structural links between programs in schools and participation in community-sporting clubs in Australia, where State Sports Governing Organizations (SSGOs) are funded to develop and implement school- and community-based sports participation programs to promote participation and wellbeing. Findings suggested better collaboration was needed between sports organizations, local clubs and local schools and effective methods for communication between schools, clubs, participants and parents should be implemented. Further, they found that the ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach was not an effective way to develop community level sports participation and club membership, recommending more tailored strategies focused around developing long-term community engagement. This study highlighted the need for research exploring specific strategies community clubs could use to build relationships with schools, with the purpose of promoting the continuity of sport participation for young athletes.

Purpose

The purpose of this research was to explore the role of community sport clubs in facilitating sport participation in the sport of rugby union in a large Canadian city, with a specific focus on the transition from youth to adult sport. Two qualitative studies were conducted, examining this question from the perspectives of both athletes and club administrators. Specifically, the first study explored athletes’ perspectives of the psychosocial factors that influenced initial involvement and continued participation on a sport community sport club. The

second study explored administrators' perspectives of the role of community sport clubs in facilitating sport development and the continuity of sport participation into adulthood.

Study 1

Sport into Adulthood:

Athletes' Perspectives of Community Clubs' Roles in Facilitating Continued Involvement

Summary

Sport participation rates in Canada have been decreasing over the past two decades, with the largest decline amongst young adults (Statistics Canada, 2012). Research has highlighted that the transition into adulthood, which occurs during the time many graduate from formal education, often threatens or changes an athlete's decision to continue in sports (Freysinger & Ray, 1994; Lim, Warner, Dixon, Berg, Kim, & Newhouse-Bailey, 2011; Lunn, 2010; Tammelin, Näyhä, Hills & Järvelin, 2003; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). As such, the purpose of this study was to explore the role of community sport clubs in facilitating sport participation, with a specific focus on the transition from youth to adult sport, by exploring the psychosocial factors that influence individuals' initial involvement and continued participation on a community sport club during young adulthood. Using a case study approach, 8 male and female athletes aged 21-30 from 6 community rugby clubs in Canada's largest city participated in the study. Data was collected through qualitative surveys and interviews and the constant comparative method was used for analysis. Findings from this study highlighted the importance of early exposure to sport. They also demonstrated that community sport clubs can provide young athletes with a pathway for continued participation through effective partnerships with schools and by providing programming that builds club loyalty and sport commitment and offers options for continued involvement into adulthood. Lastly, the findings highlight a need for additional exploration of sport developmental paths of non-elite athletes following a trajectory of competitive sport involvement over the life course.

Background

Over the past two decades, sport participation rates in Canada have been decreasing (Statistics Canada, 2012). Although this trend is found across all age groups and genders, the largest decline is amongst young adults. Between 1992 and 2010, there was a 23% decrease in participation for 15-19 year olds and a 24% decrease amongst 20-24 year olds (Statistics Canada, 2012). Research has highlighted that the transition into adulthood, which occurs during the time many graduate from formal education, often threatens or changes an athlete's decision to continue in sports due to time, availability of programming, personal commitments (e.g., family, and work status), socio-economic status, and level of educational attainment (Freysinger & Ray, 1994; Lim, Warner, Dixon, Berg, Kim, & Newhouse-Bailey, 2011; Lunn, 2010; Tammelin, Näyhä, Hills & Järvelin, 2003; Wyllemann & Lavalée, 2004). However, many studies have shown that children's early exposure to sport, which is greatly influenced by parental support and the availability of sport programs in school and the community, is associated with sport participation in adulthood (Clark, 2008; Côté, 1999; Curtis, McTeer & White, 1999; Freysinger & Ray, 1994; Green 2005; Hirvensalo & Lintunen, 2011; Holt, Kingsley, Tink & Scherer, 2011; Jakobsson, Lundvall, Redelius, & Engström, 2012; Santos, Esculcas & Mota, 2004; Wyllemann & Lavalée, 2004; Yang, Telama & Laasko, 1996). As such, the purpose of this case study was to explore the role of community sport clubs in facilitating lifelong sport participation, with a specific focus on the transition from youth to adult sport.

Models of sport participation and development.

Several sport models of sport participation and development have been proposed in literature, offering a framework by which to interpret young athletes' stages of progression during their sport participation journeys. The *Development Model for Sport Participation*

(DMSP) is one of the most widely used empirically based models of sport participation, and was first proposed by Côté (1999) in his research with junior elite athletes and their families. The DMSP has been revised and expanded through further research with athletes of diverse abilities and levels of engagement over the past several years (e.g., Côté & Hay, 2002; Côté, Baker, & Abernethy, 2007; Fraser-Thomas, Côté & Deakin, 2008; Wall & Côté, 2007), with a recent adaptation (Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2011) proposing three different streams of sport participation: recreational sport through sampling, elite performance through sampling, and elite performance through early specialization.

The DMSP proposes that most children experience the sampling years between ages 6-12 years, where athletes participate in various sports and engage primarily in deliberate play (i.e., sport engagement where rules are modified, based on the age or skill level of the athletes; Côté & Hay, 2002). During the sampling stage, it is important for parents to provide opportunities for children to enjoy sport, which includes increasing access and encouraging children to sample a wide range of activities that are enjoyable, stimulating and exciting. Furthermore, coaches, peers, and siblings play an encouraging and supportive role for athletes during the sampling years.

The sampling years are generally the foundation for continuing onto the recreational years or a springboard for advancing to the specialization and investment years. If a child follows the path to the recreational years (13+ years), they carry on participating for enjoyment and health (Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2011). Athletes who enter this pathway generally participate regularly in sports without aspirations to play at an elite level (Côté & Hay, 2002). In contrast, athletes moving into the specialization years (13-15 years), gradually decrease their involvement in other activities, and increase their focus on a particular sport. They are also introduced to increased deliberate practice, which involves more structured training with increased effort, is

designed to improve performance, and is generally perceived to be less enjoyable. Athletes who transition into the investment years (16+ years) move towards achieving an elite level of performance, by focusing on strategy, competition and skill development, generally committing to one activity and engaging in daily intense practices. During both the specialization and investment years, the role of parents, coaches, peers and siblings greatly changes. Parents provide a more supportive role, both financially and emotionally, while peers may also move into more of a supportive role. The athlete-coach relationship becomes more of a partnership with a greater focus on developing skills and techniques.

While most athletes experience the sampling years followed by recreational or specialization/investment, some elite athletes begin specialization as young as 6 years old (Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2011). This stream offers a performance-oriented environment, which involves a high amount of deliberate practice and specialization in one sport. Although the athletes often experience early elite performance, they may risk their physical health and experience decreased enjoyment, which has the potential to lead to early drop-out (Fraser-Thomas, Côté & Deakin, 2008; Wall & Côté, 2007).

Although the DMSP provides extensive insight into development pathways for sport participation of children and youth, it explores sport development only between 6-18 years and does not provide insight into continued participation into young adulthood. In addition, the DMSP does not directly address the processes involved in the transitions between each stage of development. Wylleman and Lavalée's (2004) *Development Model of Transitions Faced by Athletes* provides an extended overview of the transitions athletes encounter during sport participation from childhood (age 6 years) to adulthood (age 30+ years), proposing

developmental and interactive transitions an athlete may encounter at the athletic, psychological, social, and academic and vocational levels.

Wylleman and Lavalley's (2004) model suggests that on an athletic level, individuals generally encounter four transitions in their sport career: a) initiation (at 6-7 years), where athletes are introduced into organized competitive sport, b) development (at 12-13 years), where athletes transition into an intense level of training and competition, c) mastery (at 18-19 years), where athletes advance to the highest or elite level and d) discontinuation (at 28-30 years), where athlete transition out of competitive sports. These age ranges are approximations, as they may differ between sports. At a psychological level, major developmental stages generally align with childhood (up to 12 years), adolescence (13-18 years) and adulthood (19+ years). During childhood, development is focused on preparing the athlete for structured sport competition. Athletes are encouraged to become self-motivated, rather than being encouraged to participate by their parents. In adolescence, athletes begin to develop a stronger self-identity, as they have more mature relationships with peers, are more aware of their bodies, and become less dependent on their parents. Further, it is suggested that athletes with strong sense of self-identity transition more successfully through sport, however, they can sometimes struggle to cope when their sporting careers end.

The third level presented of Wylleman and Lavalley's (2004) model focuses on the social developments athletes encounter as they get older. During the transition into initiation, parents are highly influential in an athlete's development, as are siblings and peers. As athletes transition into development, coaches begin to play a more dominant role, expecting athletes to have technical ability and a strong work ethic. As the athlete ages, the relationship with the coach becomes more of a partnership. The coach-athlete relationship can both positively and negatively

influence an athlete's decision to continue participating in sport, particularly during athletic transitions. Finally, the academic vocational level is presented, which considers the stages of primary, secondary and higher education and vocational training/professional occupation. The transitions between vocational levels can often lead to a discontinuation in sport participation, due to lack of support or lack of achievement from the athlete. For example, many athletes discontinue participating in competitive sport following secondary education due to the changing environment and lack of opportunities to play sport at a competitive level.

The third model of interest is the Canadian Sport Institute's (2014) *Long-Term Athlete Development* (LTAD) model. First introduced in 2005, the LTAD has been adopted by Sport Canada and its National Sporting Organizations as a multi-layered framework for sport development from initial involvement to lifelong commitment. The model acknowledges the role of physical education, school sports, competitive sports and recreational activities, encouraging these organizations to work in collaboration, rather than as separate entities. The LTAD consists of a 7-stage framework focusing on physical literacy, sport excellence and lifelong physical activity and health. The first three stages form the foundation of physical literacy and include the active start stage (0-6 years) the fundamental stage (males 6-9 years and females 6-8 years) and the learning to train stage (males 9-12 years and females 8-11 years). Stages four to six focus on the pathway for athletic excellence, which includes the train to train stage (males 12-16 years and females 11-15 years) the train to compete stage (males 16-23 years and females 15-21 years) and the train to win stage (males and females 18+ years). The seventh stage, active for life, does not have a defined age group, as individuals can transition into this stage at any age, given its focus is on a lifelong commitment to physical activity and health. Further, the Active for Life stages includes two streams: a) competitive for life focuses on athletes that continue participating at a

high level in competitive leagues at the community and regional level, and b) fit for life focuses on individuals maintaining their physical fitness with enjoyable physical activity at the recreational level. It is proposed that community sport clubs, and recreation centres, as well as schools, colleges and universities offer both streams and that programs are welcoming to athletes of all ages and abilities. In addition, the active for life stage focuses on retaining retired athletes to get into supportive roles (such as coaches, officials and sport administrators) within the sport system, to support the next generation of athletes.

Given the current case study's focus on rugby, Rugby Canada's *Long-Term Rugby Development Strategy* (LTRD; Rugby Canada, 2008), a National Sport Organization specific version of the LTAD, is of particular interest. The LTRD was launched in 2008, aiming to develop better and more skillful players through its 8-stage player development pathway from introduction of physical activity to elite participation. The first five stages of the LTRD align with those of the LTAD focusing first on encouraging physical literacy and sport for all, and then moving into the development of technical skills. However, the training to win stage in the LTAD is replaced by two stages: the training to perform stage, where core and position specific skills are developed and the ultimate performance stage which focuses on achieving optimal performance. The final stage, active for life, is similar to the LTAD, as it encourages life-long physical activity and involvement in rugby; however it does not divide further into the competitive for life and fit for life streams. Unlike the LTAD, the active for life stage in the LTRD is more focused on athletes' exit from competitive sport into lifelong participation in physical activity. In addition to setting objectives and outcomes, the LTRD identifies delivery institutions at each stage that include community club programs, schools, representative teams, sports organizations (provincial and national) and athlete development centres; however, the

model does not provide insight into the roles of these partners and how they work together for optimal athlete development.

Collectively, these models highlight several key individuals factors (e.g., parents, coaches, and peer influences) and situational factors (e.g., optimal training , life transitions) related to athletes' sport participation and development; however, these models do not directly address issues of availability or accessibility of sport programs for youth to get involved with, and develop through.

Role of community sport clubs.

In her position paper, Green (2005) highlights the importance of sport administrators providing effective entrance, retention and advancement strategies that support continued participation, especially during major life and athletic transitions. While the LTAD/LTRD acknowledges the role of community sport clubs in supporting lifelong involvement in sport, few strategies are provided for how this must occur. Community sport clubs are often considered valued partners in the provision of sport programming (De Knop, Theeboom, De Martelaer, Van Puymbroeck, Wittock, & Wylleman, 1995; Lim et al., 2011), as they are “places where young people are socialized into sport competitions and, as such, form the basic foundation unit for talent development and identification.” (Kirk & MacPhail, 2003, p. 24). In addition, sport clubs provide young athletes with a sense of belonging and connections with their community (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009), as they offer opportunities for members to get involved in organizational, managerial and leadership tasks (De Knop et al., 1995). Although community sport clubs can vary in structure, they are generally regulated by a governing sporting association, led by volunteers, played outside of the education system and have minimal or no government support (Canadian Centre for Ethics and Sport, 2008). However, it was highlighted

by Lim et al. (2011) in a study exploring sport participation across the Netherlands, Korea and the United States, that many athletes are unaware of options to continue participating in organized sport beyond the educational system. It has been suggested that community sport clubs have the potential to be important partners with schools, in bridging the gap for young athletes to continue participating following graduation from formal education; however, the success of this relationship is greatly dependent on strong collaborations and communication between different sport agencies including sports organizations, local clubs and schools, and parents and athletes (Collins & Buller, 2000; Eime & Payne, 2009).

Study rationale and purpose.

Sport participation rates have been significantly decreasing over the last 20 years, particularly as youth transition into adulthood (Statistics Canada, 2012). Although extensive research has led to key models of sport participation and development, there has been little focus on exploring how athletes are supported to successfully transition between stages and ultimately develop a lifelong commitment to sport participation. Further, these models have been developed drawing largely from research among high-performing athletes, and may not be as relevant to broad-based sport participation among the masses. As such, the purpose of this case study was to explore the role of community sport clubs in facilitating sport participation in the sport of rugby union in a large Canadian city, with a specific focus on the transition from youth to adult sport. In this study we explored: a) the psychosocial factors that influence individuals' initial involvement in a community sport club, and b) the psychosocial factors that influence individuals' continued participation in a community sport club during young adulthood.

Method

Study design and context.

This study employed a case study design, as the purpose of the research was to understand the contextual conditions of a real-life phenomenon in depth by developing an understanding of “how” and “why” (Yin, 2009). The benefit of a case study is that it “ensure[s] that the issue can be explored through a variety of lenses which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood.” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 544). An embedded single-case study design was used, as the aim of the research was to view the issue from different perspectives, which enriches the analysis of the data (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Boundaries were established to ensure that the study remained reasonable in scope, while multiple sources of data were utilized to enhance the credibility of the data and aid in acquiring a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2002).

The sport of rugby union in one of Canada’s largest cities provided an appropriate context for a few key reasons. First, youth rugby participation rates are relatively high in Canadian secondary schools, with approximately 60,000 students playing each year (Rugby Canada, 2008) and the Ontario Federation of School Athletic Association (2012) reporting rugby among the secondary school sports with the highest participation rates for both girls and boys. However, it has been acknowledged that there is a lack of integration between rugby programs in school physical education, recreational community and clubs, and elite competitive programs in Canada (Rugby Canada, 2008). This lack of integration is clearly evidenced through community club participation rates, with only approximately 3,000 minor rugby players (12 years and younger), 7,500 junior players (13 -18 years) and 12,800 senior players (19+ years) registered with Rugby Canada in 2013. Given the large number of youth involved in school rugby and the

apparently much lower number that transition successfully to junior and senior club sport, the study of rugby in a large urban centre provides an optimal context to study the unique psychosocial factors that may contribute to community club and lifelong sport involvement.

Participants.

Participants included 8 rugby players (3 females, 5 males) aged 21-30 from 6 community rugby clubs in Canada's largest city. To ensure a case study's robustness, Yin (2009) suggests that conditions be identified within the theoretical framework of a multi-case study, to ensure that it is replicable. As such, in line with the case study objectives, participants were selected based on the criteria that they played rugby for their secondary school and continued to play rugby for a community rugby club into adulthood. Participants were recruited through convenience sampling through the primary researcher's personal and professional contacts and through snowball sampling (i.e., athletes and club administrators recommended other athletes as potential participants). All participants reviewed and signed an informed consent form prior to the interview, which detailed the purpose of the research, what was required of them as participants, anticipated risks, confidentiality and procedures for asking questions or withdrawing from the study. This study's protocol was in accordance with the regulations and policies set out under the affiliated university's Human Participants Research Protocol.

Data collection.

As it is recommended that case studies draw from multiple sources of information in order to develop an in-depth understanding of the research topic (Yin, 2009), participants completed a survey and took part in a face-to-face interview. The survey explored the athletes' entrance into sport, and followed their sport development through to adulthood, which was examined more extensively in the interview. Sample questions included "What influenced you to

play for a community sport club?” and “What are the top 3 reasons why you continue with the sport?” All participants were emailed an electronic version of the survey prior to the interview, which they completed and submitted to the primary researcher within one day prior to the scheduled interview, to allow time for the primary researcher to review prior to the interview.

Interviews guides were developed following an extensive review of the literature on sport development, transitions in sport, and community sport, coupled with the primary researcher’s intimate understanding of the sport of rugby union. The interview questions were in-depth, open-ended and semi-structured, allowing the interviewer to remain focused on exploring the research questions, while also allowing participants to share their experiences and perspectives, with commonalities as well as differences in experiences emerging. Questions delved into the factors that influenced participants’ initial and continued involvement in community sport clubs, including questions around recruitment, socialization, commitment, and motivation. Sample questions included, “How did you get involved in playing for a community sport club?” and “Describe to me what it was like to join your community sport club for the first time.” The interview guide was reviewed and piloted among individuals familiar with school and community club rugby prior to conducting data collection, resulting in minor changes to question sequencing and wording to assure optimal clarity in line with the objectives of the study. The majority of the interviews took place face-to-face, with two being conducted by telephone/via Skype (internet), as participants were unable to attend in person; however, past work has concluded that telephone and face-to-face interviews produce similar quality of data (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004). All interviews were digitally recorded. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity and assure their anonymity, and all data (i.e., transcripts, field notes, survey) remained confidential in a secure storage location.

Data analysis.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim by both the primary researcher and trained undergraduate students. Transcripts were then re-read extensively for accuracy and familiarity with the data. Although repetitive and filler words such as “umm” and “ahh” were transcribed and used throughout the analysis, for purposes of clarity, they were omitted from quotations presented in the results section.

Glaser and Strauss' (1967) constant comparative method was used to inform for the analysis (for both the pre-surveys and the interviews), as it is an effective process for analyzing qualitative data (Grove, 1988). The first phase consisted of allowing units of analysis to emerge through re-reading each transcription and noting key words and concepts. The second phase consisted of grouping codes together to form categories. Lastly, for the third phase, where applicable, categories were combined to develop collective themes that addressed the primary objectives of the study (i.e., to explore the psychosocial factors that influence individuals' initial involvement in community club sport, and continued involvement during young adulthood.)

Trustworthiness.

Reflexivity refers to the process by which the researcher is aware of his/her effect on the process and outcomes of the research (Anderson, 2008). As the primary researcher was actively involved in the rugby community as a player, administrator, and coach during the duration of the study, specific procedures recommended by Shenton (2004) were implemented to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability throughout participant recruitment, data collection and analysis to minimize the risk of biases (Guba, 1981). First, to ensure credibility, the primary researcher was transparent with the participants about her active role within the rugby community and familiarity with the rugby culture, which also facilitated the

development of a rapport between informant and researcher and encouraged more in-depth discussions during the interviews. To ensure the honesty of participants, they were provided with information regarding the study prior to completing consent forms, and member checking was used, whereby participants were provided with the opportunity to review transcripts, to assure they reflected their intended communications. In addition, bracketing was used, whereby meetings took place with a senior researcher at various stages of study development and analysis to minimize any risk of biases. Bracketing can be described as “a method that mitigates the potential deleterious effects of unacknowledged preconceptions related to the research and thereby to increase the rigor of the project” (Tufford & Newman, 2010, p. 81). For example, open-ended questions were included in the interview guide to minimize the chance of leading the participant in the discussion and the constant comparative method was used for analysis to ensure that themes emerged directly from the data; however, interpretations of key themes were also enhanced by the primary researcher’s experience and expertise in the field. Finally, to ensure transferability, dependability, and confirmability, specific criteria for selecting participants and appropriate data collection and analysis procedures were adhered to as outlined above, ensuring the process was replicable and robust, and data triangulation was used, whereby data were collected through both surveys and interview guides.

Results

Findings yielded four core themes: 1) athletes’ sport backgrounds, 2) introduction to community sport clubs, 3) building club loyalty and sport commitment, and 4) pathways for continued involvement in adulthood. From these four core themes, 12 subthemes emerged, which are outlined in Table 1.

Athletes' sport backgrounds.

When describing their experiences in sport participation, two sub-themes emerged, which contributed to the athletes' involvement in a community sport club later in life: introduction to sport and introduction to rugby.

Introduction to sport.

All the participants came from families who encouraged physical activity in childhood and adolescence. Most of the athletes had siblings who were also actively involved in sports and many participated in the same activities. On some occasions, older siblings had an influence on the athlete's participation in sport. One athlete commented how she looked up to her older sibling: "I have an older brother, who was playing soccer at the time [in childhood] and I think I just wanted to, you know, be like my big brother" (Rebecca). Another athlete described being brought up in a family that encouraged sport participation:

I'm the youngest of five ...three older sisters and an older brother...so when I was growing up, I mean, I pretty much played every sport or whatever was going on so...

There was always, sort of, either leftover equipment or somebody had done it before. So I sort of got exposed to a lot of different sports. (Frank)

All of the athletes participated in a range of team and individual sports as children/early adolescents, some as early as 3-4 years old, both at school and/or within the community through club programming or organized leagues. One athlete recalled her entrance in league soccer: "My parents got me playing league soccer when I was 4 years old, and I did that up until I was 11. When I was 7, I started playing football" (Rebecca). Another athlete explained her first introduction to organized sport as a child:

They [parents] signed me up for this [community club program] for kids to do track, or to continue doing track at a higher level, like a running club. So that was when I was around 10 years old. I did that from when I was 10 to about 14 years old. (Stephanie)

Introduction to rugby.

All the athletes began playing rugby in secondary school and many had little to no knowledge of the sport prior to playing. One athlete remembered her interest in trying a new sport: “The only reason I got into rugby, because I was like, what is that? I’ve never seen that! I want to try that! I was always up for trying things” (Stephanie).

Another athlete described how a peer introduced him to the sport:

Grade 10 came around, someone said “I am going for rugby tryouts” and I said, “I do not even know what that game is” and he said “oh you’ll probably like it, you get to hit a bunch of people”, which is what I like to do, so just went out for one practice and I just loved it. (Richard)

Although some athletes were encouraged to play rugby by the coach of another school sport, they were generally introduced to the sport through their secondary school peers, with whom they often played on other school teams. Some athletes commented:

It was kind of word of mouth in my school. A few of the guys were really into it, kind of right off the bat, in grade 9. Yeah, cause one of the guys, his dad was British and his dad played. He was kind of a major influence on a lot of guys in our school...a lot of the rugby crowd were on the football and hockey team, so we kind of all travelled around together on the team. (Peter)

Although some of the athletes had experience playing for community sport club during childhood and early adolescence (e.g., soccer, hockey), most of the athletes joined community

rugby clubs while in secondary school or following graduation. Three sub-themes emerged as factors that influenced the athletes' decision to join community sport club. They include: role of coaches and peers, providing a welcoming club community and the clubs' provision of competitive sport.

Role of coaches and peers.

Most participants acknowledged that they would not have known of the community rugby club pathway if it was not introduced by a coach or team mate, with the exception of some who had older siblings that played. Participants explained that the secondary school rugby coach was either a teacher at the school or a volunteer from the community. In the case of school coaches from community clubs, many encouraged their players to come out and play for the community club with which they were affiliated.

She [school coach] encouraged all of the players to come and play on her team for the summer to work on our skills because we had a limited time to learn a new sport, so I followed her to her team. It was the [club name] and they had a development team for younger players so, yeah, I just followed that coach, which is sort of funny because two years later or even the next year, [different school coach name] coached us and I followed her again and I went to her club team. (Stephanie)

Although the coach often introduced the pathway to community club rugby, peer support was very influential in athletes' decision to join. Many of the athletes played for the same community rugby club as their secondary school team mates. One athlete described how travelling with a peer made playing more accessible: "Like my friend played with me and she drove, which made it really convenient 'cause I don't drive" (Carrie). Another athlete commented how joining the club with friends made the transition less intimidating:

I was a very shy kid and going to this club, there was a lot of older women that were very good at what they were doing I was very unskilled and barely knew any of the rules about rugby. Thank goodness I had at least 2 friends usually with me...if I did not have a friend, I would have probably not have gone. (Stephanie)

Three athletes joined clubs a few years after graduating secondary school, as they had conflicting commitments, lacked encouragement from the secondary school coach, or had negative impressions of rugby clubs. One athlete commented:

Well, we [him and his friend] always sort of knew it existed, but...I knew players that played for [lists clubs]...we'd see guys around talking about playing for clubs, but to be honest with you, the sort of impression I got when I was in high school was that like...this is probably our fault, or whoever's fault for not doing more research to be honest with you, but...the impression you got was sort of like these [clubs] were like these elite clubs. Like, they're not for regular guys who want to go play rugby...a lot of them were kind of far away, and it's pretty cliquey. (Frank)

Relationships with coaches and peers were again influential in drawing some athletes to community club rugby a few years after secondary school. One athlete joined the same club that her university coach played for and another went to the same club that his former secondary school was affiliated with, after taking a break from the sport for a couple of years to focus on playing football at university.

Welcoming club community.

Many athletes highlighted how the welcoming and friendly environment during the introduction to community club sport made the transition less intimidating. One athlete commented on the support he felt once he joined the team:

Just the team camaraderie, like the welcomeness of club members...bringing me in...they bring everyone that is new to the sport and new to the club. They are very supportive and very eager to help you if you are eager to learn. That was a big plus. (Scott)

Another athlete described the atmosphere at training:

It was pretty welcoming. It was a pretty relaxed practice that day because everyone at that point was practicing lineouts and getting lineouts down, so it wasn't that intense. It was just more a fool around practice. There were a few new people there so they were just seeing where people were at and everything would form, so yeah, everyone was pretty open and helpful, giving tips and what not, so it was good. (Donny)

Clubs' provision of competitive sport.

In addition, athletes were often drawn to the element of competitive sport provided by community clubs. In particular, they spoke of opportunities for skill development and challenge, offered by training and playing with older and more experienced players. As one athlete commented:

It was kind of nice because I think one of the things that frustrated me on my [secondary school] team is that a lot of the girls that weren't fit. They were kind of there for the social aspect, where I really liked the sport aspect. So everyone was there [at club] for – to play rugby and everyone was really, really good, so it gave me the opportunity to grow as a player and I really like that I got tons of playing time. (Carrie)

Another athlete described how joining the club helped develop her skills:

It [club] was really motivating because in that early stage of joining that club, I could see myself improving so much game to game and I would be like, "I am getting better all the time" and it was a very visible improvement...I was getting feedback from others saying

“You had a great game. You’re really improving”...that was also a reason that kept me interested because I was seeing that improvement. (Stephanie)

The same athlete described how playing community club rugby while still in secondary school provided her with confidence, especially when she returned to her school team the following season:

I just remember there was an older girl on the [school] team and I was terrified of her, so when I came back [to her high school team], I was more on her equal level because I improved so much over one summer. So I definitely became more of a leader on the team even though I was one of the younger ones...so I guess the fact I was going to club and increasing my skills through the summer was definitely a factor to why I became a bigger player on the team. (Stephanie)

Building club loyalty and sport commitment.

Following their introduction to community clubs, athletes highlighted factors that contributed to their sense of club loyalty. Five sub-themes emerged: club atmosphere and philosophy, team mates, junior-senior relationships, identity as a rugby player, and opportunities for skill development, fitness, and health.

Club atmosphere and philosophy.

Athletes appreciated their club’s atmosphere and philosophy, which many described as a good balance between being competitive and social. Rebecca described this balance saying, “We are a very fun, social club who also play competitive rugby. We get both sides. Some clubs like to come out and have a beer; other clubs take it so seriously and just go home and eat couscous.” Peter also suggested, “Well, the guys are great - like a really good group of guys, a real social atmosphere. And a lot of guys are good rugby players, so it’s really good rugby actually. So it’s a

lot of fun as well.” Other athletes described how the social side to participation was a priority for them: “I still find rugby really fun so I want to keep it that way, which is probably the main reason...is the social reason. I go there because I have so much fun with the people and with the sport” (Stephanie). Frank also explained how the club’s atmosphere and philosophy met his needs: “I wanted to play competitive...but I didn’t want to sort of be fighting for a spot consistently every week...I didn’t want to fight for a spot to be a member of the team”.

One athlete had actually changed clubs, as he was drawn to a particular club for its flexibility, which allowed him to coach a junior rugby program in addition to playing, and balancing his personal life:

Yeah, the reason that I play for them [his current club] is because I coach. So two nights in the week are already on the field with the younger guys and I didn’t want to have to spend another two nights with my own practising and then Saturday playing. Five days of rugby would just be too much for my lifestyle right now...the other team gives me the freedom to coach and play at the same time, while I can still work out, see my friends and have a life. (Peter)

Team mates.

Just as peers were key influences in bringing athletes to club sport, team mates and friendships were one of the main reasons athletes continued playing for their club. Many described their team mates as supportive, with some even expressing devotion to their team mates and incredible pride in playing for their team. One athlete described his relationship: “Just very heart warming. Everyone is very open, everyone is friendly, everyone is always giving advice and just trying to help each other out...very family like” (Donny).

Senior-junior mentorship.

Extending on the importance of teammates, it is worthwhile noting that athletes reflected on how as junior players, they really valued their relationships with older players, who influenced their sense of belonging, as they made them feel accepted into a ‘family’. One athlete commented:

Me and one of my other buddies went out to the bar when we were like 17-18 (years old) and had drinks with all these old guys, you know, and they [were] telling us all the stories about [secondary school coach] and just the good times they had, the tours they went on.
(Richard)

Many athletes also spoke of the important role of senior mentors as they made the transition from junior to senior development teams. As Scott commented:

I remember that first game – playing from juniors to the men’s level and just kind of the physicality...you are finally playing against men when you are a kid...it’s kind of nerve wracking...you are kind of nervous...having your team mates and coaches all there sort of guiding you along the way, that really helps. After the first one you get used to it, you know you can do it.

Scott went on to highlight how rugby clubs often facilitated this transition gradually, by providing young athletes with opportunities to play for the senior development teams, to help build their confidence and prepare them to join the senior programs once they turned 18: “That extra step was very important because I think if I would have just sort of come in...and you don’t have that confidence level.”

Identity as a rugby player.

Many athletes described their identity as a rugby player, when outlining their loyalty to their team, using words and phrases such as: “I am a lifer” and “it’s in my veins”, when expressing their commitment to the sport. As one player commented,

I love the sport. It gives me a thrill. I just can’t get enough of it...during the off season, I am like, who am I, if I am not a rugby player? So I identify...I am that person and it’s important for how I see myself and how I feel about myself. (Stephanie)

Rugby clearly played a paramount role in their daily lives, as evidenced by the following athletes’ comments:

I love those 80 minutes, like that’s the highlight of my week...Rugby - it’s become part of my life. It’s just like in me now. It’s in my blood. I couldn’t not be involved with rugby...it’s such a culture; it’s something you belong to. (Frank)

Opportunities for skill development, fitness, and health.

Many athletes suggested they continued playing rugby because it allowed them to continue developing their skills and stay active. As Peter commented, “A lot of guys are good rugby players, so it’s really good rugby actually.” Stephanie outlined, “I guess it’s the only reason I am in shape and healthy, because I hate exercising, so if I am doing it within a team, then I’ll stay fit and healthy.” Athletes were motivated by the opportunities to train and play with more experienced and talented players within their club; they felt this helped them improve their skills, especially among clubs that drew international athletes. As one athlete described:

What I love most about this club is the fact we draw so much more international attention...We get a lot of people who get a visa for a year from other countries...So it’s awesome because then you get to experience...so it’s really cool. (Donny)

Further, athletes that were playing at the university level, emphasized how community club rugby helped them maintain their skills and physical condition over the summer. Carrie commented, “I want to continue playing play because I know that if I don’t play club, I am not going to start for the university [varsity name]. I’m not going to get better.”

Despite most participants conveying a strong sense of club loyalty, two athletes expressed some frustrations with their club with regard to its lack of competitiveness and opportunities for advancement and skill development. One athlete described her challenges:

This year I thought about it [leaving] ‘cause when I was in England, I got to play number 8 and I loved it. I have so much more energy when I am not front rowing...I just would like a chance to play there and I have asked multiple times, and it’s tough having friends and peers who are now my coaches and there are few other senior players having a tough time with it. (Rebecca)

Another athlete expressed interest in moving clubs to assure optimal competitive opportunities, once he graduated from post-secondary education:

I really don’t know what I am going to do once I am done university because I feel like I can be a lot more competitive. In that case, I would have to move up, trying out for other teams. (Donny)

However, among these athletes, the previously outlined theme of team mates fostering club loyalty often resonated very strongly, as team mates were a significant factor in these athletes’ decision to stay with the club. Rebecca commented, “What keeps me with the [club name] are my team mates...especially my lock [playing position]. She would not let me leave.” Donny also explained, “So for time being, I don’t think I would [leave] just because I really do

like the guys...right now, I feel like my decision would be to just stick with the [club] nonetheless.”

Pathways for continued involvement in adulthood.

Flexibility of club programs for all levels and transitioning into leadership roles were two factors that influenced the athletes' intentions to continue their involvement in the sport.

Flexible club programs for all levels.

Most athletes intended to continue playing club rugby as long as their health and life circumstances permitted. Rebecca commented, “Knock on the wood, as long as I stay injury free. Umm, unless I have kids, I will just keep playing.” Similarly, Stephanie suggested, “I always said I would play until menopause...so I am going to play it until I am really old...when my body can't handle it anymore.” However, most athletes also recognized that physical constraints (i.e., injury or aging body) or life commitments (i.e., career or family) could possibly change their level of sport participation and involvement in the club in the future, also expressing an interest in staying involved by playing more casually at a lower level. One athlete explained:

I do think the great part about rugby is...you have the seconds and thirds (lower level) teams. I think that is so important because you have guys with kids with crazy jobs and they come out on Saturdays and play rugby and have a great time and it's not a super high level but they have a bit of fun. (Peter)

Transitioning into leadership roles.

In addition, many of the athletes intended to continue being involved in the sport and club by transitioning into new roles as coaches, referees or administrators. Three of the athletes were already involved in coaching at the secondary school and junior club level and some were

actively involved as administrators on their clubs' executive committees. One athlete described how coaching was fuelled by his motivation to advance community club programming:

I like teaching the sport if I can or helping out...I volunteer coach at my high school during their seasons as well. It's a good way to build the club. If you have different guys coaching different schools and helping out in the community, then it helps our club as well, right? You get kids associated with the sports early and make them feel a part of something and then whether or not they decide to continue with the [club] or if they go to somewhere else, they can play club rugby close to them. It's good to have that association...It's enjoyable. They helped me out and now I am giving back. I now do what our coach did for us when I was in high school. It's a good experience. (Scott)

Discussion

While recent research has led to the development of numerous models of sport participation and development, there has been little focus on exploring how athletes are supported to successfully transition between stages and ultimately develop a lifelong commitment to sport participation; this, despite decreasing sport participation rates (Statistics Canada, 2012). As such, the purpose of this case study was to explore the role of community sport clubs in facilitating sport participation in the sport of rugby union in a large Canadian city, with a specific focus on the transition from youth to adult sport; this study explored the psychosocial factors that influence individuals' initial involvement in community club sport, and continued involvement in community club sport during young adulthood. Findings from this study demonstrate that community sport clubs can provide young athletes with a pathway for continued participation through key partnerships and initiatives. Findings also highlight a need

for additional exploration of sport developmental paths of non-elite athletes following a trajectory of competitive sport involvement over the life course.

Delivery pathways for sport participation – role of community sport clubs.

The LTAD (Canadian Sport Institute, 2014) and the LTRD (Rugby Canada, 2008) acknowledge the role of stakeholders (i.e., community sport clubs, schools, etc...) in providing sport pathways, but provide few details on how these stakeholders can support athletes to continue participating in sport. In this section, we focus on findings related to building partnerships with schools, assuring positive first impressions, and building sport and club loyalty, and their particular importance during major life and athletic transitions.

Building partnerships with schools.

As most of the athletes were introduced to the community club sport pathway through their school team, findings support past suggestions that strong partnerships between stakeholders such as local schools and community sport clubs can assist athletes' continued participation in competitive organized sports within the community (Collins & Buller, 2000; Eime & Payne, 2009). However, this study extends insight into partnership, by highlighting the role of coaches and peers in supporting this transition. The role of the coach appears particularly important, as many were encouraged to join community sport clubs through their secondary school coach and began playing for the same club the coach was affiliated with. This study also showed how lack of encouragement from a coach could lead to a missed opportunity for athletes to make the transition into adult community club based sport. These findings support previous research by Fraser-Thomas and Côté (2009) suggesting coaches' enthusiasm, positivity and support can influence athlete's continued participation in sport. Collectively, these findings imply future intervention research and initiatives aimed at increasing sport participation into

adulthood should engage local schools and place additional focus on for the provision of coaching support. Additionally, given many athletes' lack of awareness about community sport programming, focus should be placed on availability of accessible programming for all age and skill levels.

Findings of this study also highlighted the importance of school peers in facilitating continued participation into adulthood. Although Wyllemann and Lavallee's (2004) *Development Model of Transitions Faced by Athletes* recognizes the role of team mates in supporting continued participation, the model does not provide any detailed information how this relationship is facilitated. This research highlights the influential role of peers in supporting players through athletic transitions. Many athletes were encouraged by their school team mates to join both school and community club rugby teams. In a study conducted by Ullrich-French and Smith (2009), it was suggested that athletes who have more positive perceptions of peer acceptance and friendship are more likely to continue participating in activities. From a practical perspective, given student-athlete leaders' apparent role in recruiting athletes along a path to prolonged sport involvement, coaches may want to identify and encourage leaders within school teams to play community club sport, with the intention of working with them to recruit their team mates to join as well. Further research should also be conducted to explore how coaches can best mentor peer leaders to optimally influence continued sport participation, as this information may assist sport administrators when developing their recruitment strategies.

The importance of first impressions.

Providing athletes with pathways for continued participation through strong school partnerships is essential, but does not guarantee individuals will successfully transition and commit to a new sport program. Green (2005) highlighted that athletes are often challenged with

re-socialization and having to learn new skills and concepts when they advance to a new team, which can be very intimidating and can lead to drop-out, therefore, initial impressions are important. Findings from this research emphasize the critical importance of a welcoming environment for athletes considering continued participation. In particular, positive interactions with team mates, especially senior players, helped young athletes feel more accepted within a new team. Appropriate program level was also of critical importance in the recruitment and development process for young athletes, whereby junior athletes were grouped with individuals of similar age, size and skill level and gradually introduced opportunities to play for the senior development team, gaining increased confidence to fully transition to the senior programs once they became 18 years old. These findings support research by Allen (2003), which suggested that social opportunities such as making friends, developing close relationships, and gaining recognition and social status can greatly influence motivation and physical competence, which can enhance an athlete's sense of belonging. As there is limited knowledge on the factors influencing an athlete's entrance within a new team, it is recommended that further research be conducted in this area.

Building sport commitment and club loyalty.

Finally, once involved in community club sport, findings speak to what kept athletes committed, with themes relating to the club atmosphere and philosophy, team mates, junior-senior relationships, athletes' identity as a rugby player, and the opportunities afforded for skill development, fitness, and health contributed. Generally, these findings support the sport commitment model, which proposes that sport enjoyment, involvement opportunities, personal investment and social support can positively influence continued sport participation (Carpenter, 1995; Scanlan, Simons, Carpenter, Schmidt & Keeler, 1993; Weiss, Kimmel, & Smith, 2001).

Findings also support previous research which suggests that community sport clubs can provide young athletes with a sense of belonging and connection with the community (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009); this was particularly evident among athletes whose relationships with team mates' sub-seeded their desire to pursue advancement in the sport, again reinforcing the critical importance of social and mentoring initiatives to optimize team cohesiveness (Allen, 2003).

As major life transitions can threaten an athlete's continued participation in competitive sport due to new responsibilities and time constraints (Wyllemann and Lavallee, 2004), this research revealed how community sport clubs can provide an environment that promotes lifelong involvement, regardless of an athlete's time commitments or skill level. Many of the athletes appreciated the flexibility community sport clubs provided, by allowing them to remain involved even if their commitment levels were to change. In addition, many expressed interest in staying involved with the club, even when their playing years were over by transitioning into a leadership role such as coaching or administration, supporting the LTAD active for life stream, which encourages athletes to remain in the sport to act as mentors for the next generation of athletes (Canadian Sport Institute, 2014).

Sport development pathways for structured competitive sport.

This case study also provides insight into sport development pathways, as many of the athletes involved in this study followed a path that has not received much attention in the sport participation and development models. During childhood, the athletes sampled a wide range of sport and physical activities and began specializing in fewer sports in adolescence, but were not introduced to their primary sport until later adolescence when they began secondary school. In late adolescence/early adulthood, they made the transition from inter-school sport to being a member of a competitive community sport club. They continued to be involved in a few different

sports on a recreational level, but were focused primarily on rugby, and planned to continue playing the sport throughout their adult life, until their body or unforeseen circumstances no longer allowed them to play. They were motivated to continue playing for the competition, the skill development, staying active, and because they felt a strong sense of loyalty and commitment to their club and sport. While the DMSP (Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2011), the Developmental Model of Transitions Faced by Athletes (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004) and the LTAD model (Canadian Sport Institute, 2014) provide frameworks of sport development streams of sport participation and development, none of these models appears to clearly represent the pathway of athletes in this study, who continue to play structured competitive sport into adulthood at a non-elite level.

As the DMSP (Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2011) is among the most widely reviewed and applied sport participation and development models in the academic literature, we focus our attention primarily to this model in our discussion. Based on our findings, we propose that the three existing DMSP trajectories (recreational sport through sampling, elite performance through sampling, and elite performance through early specialization), be revised (see Figure 1).

First, consideration may be given to revising the age ranges for each stage of the DMSP to be more inclusive of the diverse and alternative timelines young athletes follow in their sport development. Findings from this research suggest that some athletes were introduced to sport as early as 3-4 years old and began specializing and investing at varying ages. In addition, the current DMSP model addresses sport participation for children and youth up to 18 years old but does not account for youth who continue participating past 18 years of age, or discontinue participating following secondary school (e.g., due to lack of programming or time constraints of schooling or employment) and return in early adulthood (i.e., in their early to mid-20's) by

joining a sports program in the community. Models such as the *Development Model of Transitions Faced by Athletes* (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004) and the LTAD/LTRD (Canadian Sport for Life, 2014; Rugby Canada, 2008) offer a more comprehensive age range for sport participation (i.e., 0-35+, lifespan) while also allowing periods of overlap between stages, perhaps more accurately representing the developmental transitions athletes encounter as they age. Based collectively on findings of this study, and concepts supported from other sport participation models, we suggest that the age range be extended from 6-18 years to instead begin at age 3 and include sport participation throughout the lifespan, as this research highlighted that athletes enter and transition through to structured competitive sport programs at different stages in their lives. By including broader age ranges within each stage of the DMSP, future researchers may be able to provide better insight into the specific development pathways for continued participation for athletes transitioning from youth to adult sport.

Findings of this study also suggest that there may be value in revising the second trajectory from ‘elite performance through sampling’ to ‘high performance through sampling’. Participants in this study were clearly in the specializing and investing stages of their sport development, rather than the recreational stage, yet most were not on a path to elite sport. A modification to ‘high performance sport through sampling’ may be more inclusive to all athletes who continue participating in structured competitive sport, but do not actually reach the most elite levels. Consistent with the DMSP (Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2011), athletes would continue to have the opportunity to shift between the streams, as some athletes may develop the talent to move into the elite performance stream or decide to move into a less competitive atmosphere at different stages in their participation.

Strengths, limitations, and future directions.

This research was the first to our knowledge to explore the role of community sport clubs in facilitating young athletes' continued participation in sport into adulthood. Although the study context in the sport of rugby offers some unique circumstances (e.g., opportunities and challenges) with regards to administration and player development when compared to other sports and contexts, findings from this research have the potential to provide insight into strategies for initial and continued involvement through community sport clubs, which may be of interest to other sports and activity contexts.

This study provides a strong picture of the challenges facing sports programs in urban communities, as it was conducted in Canada's largest city; however, it is recommended that further research be carried out amongst different structured sport environments such as rural and suburban communities, as they may present different challenges and opportunities, which could offer additional insight on advancing knowledge of sport development pathways among youth. For example, specific barriers associated with urban environments, such as fear of crime, road safety and the lack of accessible and affordable sporting facilities and programs, may influence participation in sport, especially for marginalized communities (Edwards & Tsouros, 2006; Gordon-Larsen, Nelson, Page, & Popkin, 2006).

In addition, athletes in this study were involved in a community club sport in a team setting. It is recommended that further research be conducted with athletes who play individual sports, as past research has highlighted numerous differences between team and individual sport athletes and contexts (Baker, Yardley & Côté, 2003). Previous research showing athletes are more likely to participate in individual sports or invest more time into their personal fitness as they age because such activities are not dependent on companions or facilities and can participate

during a time that is convenient for the individual (Lim et al., 2011; Lunn, 2010; Tammelin et al., 2003) make the study of individual sports of particular importance.

Finally, while this study explored the role of community sport clubs in facilitating lifelong sport participation in the sport from the players' perspective, it is part of a larger research project that also draws upon the experiences of administrators (e.g., directors and coaches) of community rugby clubs (Wolman & Fraser-Thomas, submitted). By examining the topic from two different viewpoints, these studies collectively provide a rich insight into factors that influence continued sports participation. However, it is recommended that further research be conducted utilizing additional methods in order to gain a broader understanding of sport culture and the socio-cultural factors that may influence the continuity of sport participation in structured competitive sport from youth to adulthood. For example, it would be beneficial to conduct prospective studies of sport participation from adolescence through to adulthood, as the current study was dependent on the athlete's ability to recall their previous experiences. Further study of athletes who successfully made the transition from youth to adult sport participation are necessary, as prospective studies may provide insight into the barriers/factors that influence athletes to discontinue in sport, especially during the transition of graduating from formal education.

Table 1

Summary of study 1 results

Theme	Subtheme
1. Athletes' Sport Background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to sport • Introduction to rugby
2. Introduction to Community Sport Clubs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role of coaches and peers • Welcoming club community • Clubs' provision of competitive sport
3. Building Club Loyalty and Sport Commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Club atmosphere and philosophy • Team mates • Senior-junior mentorship • Identity as a rugby player • Opportunities for skill development, fitness, and health
4. Pathways for Continued Involvement in Adulthood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexibility of club programs • Transitioning into leadership role

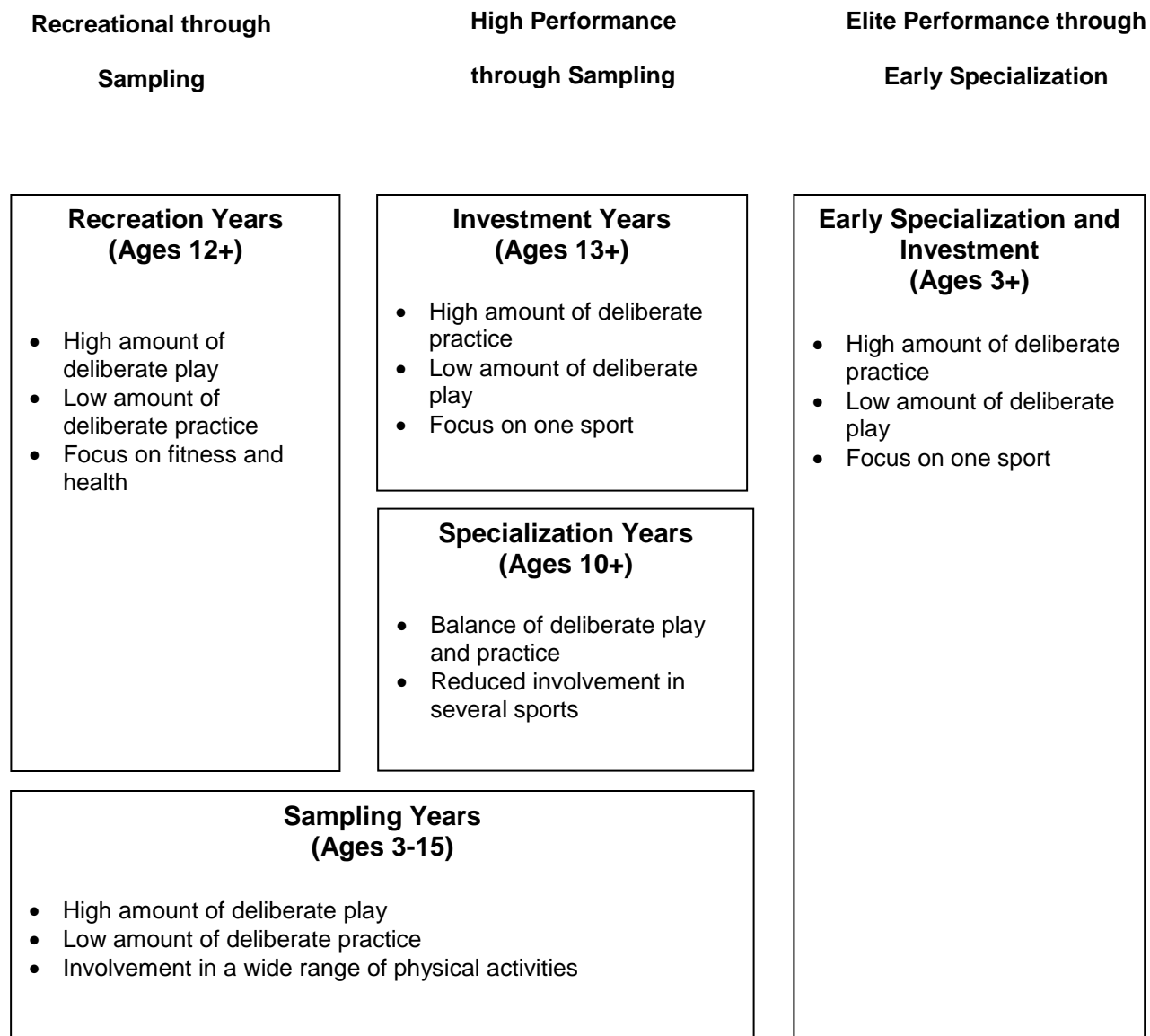


Figure 1. Proposed trajectories of sport participation presented as modifications to the Developmental Model of Sport Participation (Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2011).

Study 2

Exploring Administrators' Perspectives of Community Clubs' Roles in Sport Development and Continued Participation

Background

Declining sport participation is a concern across Western culture, particularly among children and youth (Clark, 2008; Physical Activity Council, 2012). In Canada, sport participation rates amongst children and youth aged 5-14 has seen a significant decrease from 57% in 1992 to 51% in 2005 (Clark, 2008). This pattern appears to continue across the lifespan, as there was a 17% drop in sport participation amongst Canadians 15 years and older from 45% to 28% over the same 13-year period (Statistics Canada, 2012). While numerous individual factors such as motivation, ability, and enjoyment influence individuals' sport participation, additional socio-cultural factors such as the built, natural, and social environments should not be overlooked (Edwards & Tsouros, 2006). Of particular interest are sport participation patterns within large urban areas, as past research suggests urban environments are associated with specific barriers to active living which include fear of crime, road safety and the lack of accessible and affordable sporting facilities and programs, especially for marginalized communities (Edwards & Tsouros, 2006; Gordon-Larsen, Nelson, Page, & Popkin, 2006; Moore, Jilcott, Shores, Evenson, Brownson, & Novick, 2010).

Sport participation trends also highlight that sport participation declines with age (Statistics Canada, 2012). As individuals go through various life and athletic transitions, they often experience a decline in or withdrawal from sport due to time, availability of programming, personal commitments (e.g., family, and work status), socio-economic status, and educational attainment (Freysinger & Ray, 1994; Lim, Warner, Dixon, Berg, Kim, & Newhouse-Bailey, 2011; Lunn, 2010; Tammelin, Näyhä, Hills & Järvelin, 2003; Wyllemann & Lavallee, 2004). One of the most significant transitions athletes encounter is graduation from formal education. During this period, many athletes drop-out of team sports to focus on individual sports (e.g., golf

and running) or personal fitness (e.g., yoga and weight training) and move towards passive participation, such as spectatorship, which takes away from discretionary time for active participation (Lim et al., 2011; Lunn, 2010; Tammelin, et al., 2003). It is evident that this life transition influences sports involvement, as the most significant drop in sport participation among Canadians is between 15-19 year olds and 20-24 year olds (Statistics Canada, 2012).

In her position paper, *Building Sport Programs to Optimize Athlete Recruitment, Retention, and Transition: Toward a Normative Theory of Sport Development*, Green (2005) provides insight into effective strategies for sport development and programming. Green explores a pyramid model for sport development and suggests that high-performance sport greatly depends on broad based participation. However, she suggests that for this model to be effective, sport administrators must develop strategic plans that focus on increasing sport participation amongst children and adolescents by providing effective athlete entrance, retention and advancement strategies. These suggestions compliment the World Health Organization's recommendation that all levels of government collaborate to create opportunities for sport and physical activity participation (Edwards & Tsouros, 2006).

Given significant declines in sport participation in western cultures, coupled with previous work highlighting the important role of community sport clubs as partners in the sport development process (Collins & Buller, 2000; De Knop, Theeboom, De Martelaer, Van Puymbroeck, Wittock, & Wylleman, 1995; Lim et al., 2011), this chapter draws upon the experiences of administrators (i.e., directors and coaches) of community rugby clubs in Canada's largest city, to explore the sport development process and facilitation of continued sports participation.

Context and Method

While rugby was established in Canada in the late 1800s, participation in this sport remains relatively low compared to other sports in Canada. Rugby was chosen as an appropriate context to examine the role of community club administrators in the sport development process in part due to the sport's participation trends. More specifically, while the sport boasts moderate involvement levels in Canadian secondary schools (i.e. approximate 60,000 participants each year; Rugby Canada, 2008), community club levels are very low (i.e., approximately 7,500 registered players of secondary school age each year; Rugby Canada, 2013). While the structure of community rugby clubs varies, it is in line with other sport clubs' structures, generally providing organized sport activities regulated by a governing sporting association, outside of the education system, and relying heavily on volunteers with minimal or no government support (Canadian Centre for Ethics and Sport, 2008).

In this chapter, we draw upon data collected through semi-structured interviews with directors and coaches of junior programs from six community rugby clubs in Canada's largest city. All six of the community rugby clubs provided senior (i.e., young adults, adult), and junior (i.e., under-18, under-16) programming, while four programs also provided child and youth programming (under-14, under-12). Some of the clubs offered multiple teams per age group and many clubs provided male and female programming. All participating clubs were membership based sports organizations that were administered by an executive committee. The rugby season for these clubs generally ran from May to October, however, many of the clubs provided year round programming (e.g. off-season training, tours, exhibition games, etc.). In the sections that follow, we present challenges and strategies as discussed by administrators in the areas of children's early sport exposure, building partnerships with schools, developing player

commitment, supporting athletes during the transition into adulthood, and building programs that are sustainable and encourage regeneration.

Early Entrance into Sport

Most of the administrators providing programs to child and youth players (i.e., under-12 and under-14) commented on the consistent success of these players in transitioning through to the older age groups, as they developed a love for the sport and strong sense of belonging from a young age. Previous work has highlighted that early introduction to sport and physical activity are predictors of continued participation in later years (Clark, 2008; Côté, 1999; Green 2005; Hirvensalo & Lintunen, 2011; Holt, Kingsley, Tink, & Scherer, 2011; Jakobsson, Lundvall, Redelius & Engström, 2012; Lunn, 2010; Richards, Williams, Poulton & Reeder, 2007; Santos, Esculcas & Mota, 2004; White & McTeer, 2012; Tammelin et al., 2003; Yang, Telama & Laakso, 1996) and that sampling sports that focus on play and enjoyment during childhood can foster continued commitment to sport (Wall & Côté, 2007).

However, administrators also suggested that most of the younger children and youth who participated in rugby programs had found their way to rugby through unique sport experiences: most had parents with a background in the sport and/or had parents who were already members of the club. As such, community sport clubs may need to widen their appeal and accessibility to children and youth outside immediate sport communities, to those of more diverse sport backgrounds and socioeconomic backgrounds. In recognizing this need, one participant highlighted a successful program from another sport:

I saw one morning on a television show, [P. K.] Subban, the kid who plays hockey for the [Montreal] Canadiens [professional hockey team]... This hockey player kick started a youth program where he takes used equipment and takes it into the inner-city and the

foundation provides free time for inner-city kids to play hockey because they can't afford it with ice rentals and the sport being so expensive to play, which I think is brilliant. So more programs like that would be great if they were available - that take competitive sports and get kids in the inner city areas playing at a younger age.

Administrators of child and youth programs also suggested that some children had found their way to the sport, simply because the program was offered in the local community. As such, administrators emphasized the importance of more actively engaging the local community. Initiatives such as a community open house may be effective, as past work has found that parents are more likely to enroll their children in community sport clubs if they (the parents) are provided with an introductory club session to increase their knowledge of the sport and engagement with the local club (Eime & Payne, 2009).

Partnerships with Schools

Given the importance of early sport introduction, coupled with children's differing opportunities to receive early exposure, it follows that elementary schools can play an important role in the sport development process. While only one administrator was actively providing elementary school programming, he noted that this approach was very successful in increasing exposure to the sport, and drawing children and youth to their club. Other administrators highlighted the importance of building partnerships with local elementary schools, suggesting early involvement would in turn lead children to gain confidence and be more likely to try out for school teams in secondary school. Previous work has highlighted that among younger athletes, partnerships between school and community sport clubs can help bridge the gap between physical education and out-of-school activity (Collins & Buller, 2000; Eime & Payne, 2009).

Administrators also spoke to the importance of partnerships at the secondary school level in the processes of sport development and continued participation. Middle and secondary schools can be beneficial in offering a broad range of inexpensive sport programs, and opening up opportunities for all youth to participate in sport, especially those who come from low socioeconomic backgrounds (White & McTeer, 2012). Further, participation in sport programs at the secondary school level has been associated with involvement in sport later in life (Curtis et al., 1999; Howell & McKenzie, 1987; Tammelin et al., 2003; White & Curtis, 1990).

Administrators of community rugby clubs outlined how they relied on partnerships with secondary schools to recruit for their junior (i.e., under-18, under-16) programs. Many suggested that teachers, who were also affiliated with clubs, were valuable resources in effectively drawing players to club programs, particularly when these teachers were coaching the secondary school team. However, administrators recognized this opportunity was often unrealistic in smaller clubs that lacked members who were teachers in the local community, resulting in secondary school teams being coached by club members that had no affiliation with the schools. Administrators expressed their concerns for the sustainability of this model, given these coaches' time availability was dependent on their work situation and personal obligations, which function outside the school model. One administrator, who coached in both the community club and local secondary school, explained how he managed to balance his work and coaching responsibilities, while also recognizing he was somewhat fortunate in his situation:

Myself, I am a civil servant. I have very good bosses who allow me to leave early and make up time, that sort of thing. My schedule is 7-4 on a daily basis so generally they practice before or after school, so it comes down to taking time off or making up the time coming in early one day and work late the next day so it becomes a little bit of a strain on

your work. My work is very flexible in allowing me to leave early and stuff...I have a very understanding girlfriend, which is a good thing, but it is a strain.

Administrators also emphasized the significant role of members of school teams who also played for community club teams, in drawing players to clubs. Past work has highlighted the importance of supportive and encouraging peers in contributing to athletes' continued sport participation during adolescence (Fraser-Thomas, Côté & Deakin, 2008). One administrator recommended that community coaches should identify influential leaders on school teams and focus on recruiting them to the club, with the expectation that they would encourage other players to join them.

Building Sport Commitment and Club Loyalty

In her position paper, Green (2005) emphasized that although recruitment is essential for building sports programs, it does not guarantee that athletes will continue with sport; as such, administrators must provide programs that facilitate optimal motivation and socialization. Administrators spoke of the importance of building sport commitment and club loyalty; however, they suggested this was sometimes difficult. One participant described a specific situation when he realized his failure to create an optimal climate in line with his young athletes' motivation and goal orientation:

The kids played absolutely terribly and there was no heart in their performance so I kind of punished them a little bit...I did old fashioned diamonds...I gave them a minute to complete it and a lot of the kids from the inner-city struggled after the second diamond. It kind of pissed me off and shocked me and I was shouting at them. Then as I was driving away, it kind of clicked. I can't really be upset with these kids because for a lot of them, this is the first sport they have ever played.

In this quote, the coach appears to realize that his focus on successful performance (i.e., ego-oriented climate; Nicholls, Cheung, Lauer, & Pastashnick, 1989) was not in line with athletes' engagement in the sport for reasons related to pleasure and enjoyment (i.e., intrinsic motivation; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Instead, he may have been more effective in facilitating a task-oriented climate, focused on personal improvement, effort based goals, and learning through mistakes (Duda, Chi, Newton, Walling, & Catley, 1995); he went on to discuss the value of building programming that satisfied a range of competencies and interests.

Administrators also described socialization processes that appeared to facilitate a strong connection between club players, contribute to the development of players' identity, while in turn increasing commitment and responsibility to the team and sport. For example, many clubs provided players with branded clothing and equipment, facilitating their identity within and loyalty to the club. Some clubs outlined how they used social media as an effective means to communicate with young players. As one administrator commented:

We have a Facebook and Twitter account so they can follow us on that. All club events are shown on the website. That's big for the junior kids. They don't put their phones down or they are on the computer, so it makes them feel part of the club that way as well.

Supporting Continued Participation Following Secondary School

Although many administrators were pleased with the sport development processes in their child, youth, and junior programs, they expressed concern that few players were continuing into senior programs. As previously outlined, graduation from secondary school is one of the first major life transitions that young athletes encounter, and it is often accompanied by a decline or even withdrawal from sport (Freysinger & Ray, 1994; Lim et al., 2011; Lunn, 2010; Tammelin et al., 2003). In Canadian rugby, as in many sport programs, graduation from

secondary school occurs at approximately the same time as the transition from junior to senior level of competition. Green (2005) discusses the challenges of advancing to higher levels, suggesting athletes perceive the transition to be particularly difficult when moving up age groups without teammates, as they need to re-socialize, in addition to learning new skills and concepts. While some athletes may be overwhelmed by this potential change, one administrator highlighted that those who chose to continue, often found the experience more feasible than anticipated:

Kids seem to think there's a huge difference between university or high school rugby and then stepping up to the men's side. I am sure a lot of kids are put off by the thought of playing with senior men. We've have a couple of kids that have done it this year and we had one U-18 play for the thirds team [a lower competitive level senior team] and he was shocked to see how comparatively similar [the experience was].

As such, Green's suggestions that administrators implement strategies that support young players moving on to higher levels are critical for continued sport participation. Although none of the administrators had formal strategies for transitioning players, many outlined effective methods their clubs used for gradually introducing junior players to senior teams, and supporting them throughout this transition. For example, one administrator outlined:

Players who are ready, we invite them to come out and play for the men's [team] when they're still 17 and 18 years old. So they are still playing their junior games but we try to get them to come out to men's games as well. As long as they know what they're doing and if it's safe for them to do so, we try to get them to come out and play. So they start building social connections with the men's team while they're still at the junior age. So,

next year when they are no longer junior eligible, they already have the social connections with the men's team.

As evidenced in this quote, administrators valued and aimed to support younger players' social comfort within their new team, in addition to assuring they had the skills necessary to transition successfully. Junior and senior training sessions were also organized in a way that facilitated opportunities for additional interactions between these teams, as practices were often arranged on the same days and at the same location. Further, one administrator outlined a mentorship program, in development at the time of the interview, where senior players would work directly with junior players on position specific training:

We are actually talking about doing more of a mentorship program one session next year where first team and second team players are going to be asked to come out and take position specific training session with the U15, U16 and U18 kids to try and get a bond, have the guys meet together, and to try and create a bit of a bond between the club.

Finally, administrators spoke about club wide social events such as award banquets, off-season training sessions, and watching international matches together, which encouraged their members to socialize with one another and created opportunities for juniors and seniors to build a stronger bond through a sense of belonging to the larger club.

While administrators highlighted their strengths in transitioning young athletes, they also recognized areas requiring improvement. In particular, many discussed the value of improved communication between the junior and senior administrative teams. One suggestion included the creation of an administrative position focused on player development, specifically supporting players as they advance to higher-level teams. Further, given past research highlighting a lack of time as a key reason for decreased sport participation following secondary school (i.e., due to

focus on establishing a career, pressures of post-secondary education, and/or changing interests to personal fitness versus sport; Lim et al., 2011; Lunn, 2010; Tammelin, et al., 2003), additional investigation is necessary to understand how administrators may successfully facilitate young athletes' navigation through changing social times.

Sustainability and Regeneration of Programs

For community clubs to be effective in sport development and continuity, their programs must be sustainable and offer a vision for regeneration (Green, 2005). Many administrators acknowledged that their club's strategic planning for junior development could be improved. They outlined the need to engage in more forward thinking; both to better help young players move successfully through the system, but also to assure the club's continued existence and success should key members of the administration leave the club. In particular, participants indicated that clubs' junior and senior teams could work more collaboratively, to ensure that each teams' initiatives and allocation of resources were in-line with the club's priorities. One administrator discussed his increased awareness of discrepancies and missed opportunities within the club, only after beginning to coach on a junior (versus senior) team: "It's only having joined the junior section and coaching the U-16 that you kind of realize how little support is available for the junior section - coaches and money. The lack of money that is available - it's kind of disappointing."

In addition to strategic planning, administrators recommended another capacity building regeneration initiative involving the training and certification of young players. More specifically, trained and certified junior players (e.g., secondary school students) could provide coaching support to their elementary schools in addition to their community club under-14 and under-12 programs, while senior players (e.g., post-secondary students or recent graduates) could

return to their former secondary schools to coach and mentor young athletes, in addition to being more involved with junior club programs. Administrators argued that providing certification and funding through coaching would increase clubs' coaching resources, assist in developing strong relationships within the community, and provide opportunities to develop athletes' commitment to the sport and club, beyond their playing years. One administrator described their success with such an initiative:

We train our grade 9 and grade 10 kids to become community coaches and go back to their elementary schools and they take a flag rugby team. These kids still have an attachment to their elementary school, so they are a big deal coming back to their school saying, "I'm a rugby player..." You know, helping with the gym teacher.

Conclusions and Practical Implications

At a time when sports participation rates are on the decline among children, youth and across the lifespan, it is essential for community sport clubs to explore new strategies and opportunities for athlete entrance and commitment to sport. This issue is of particular relevance and pertinence in urban communities, where participation rates are among the lowest. In this chapter, we drew upon insights of directors and coaches in six community rugby clubs with junior programs in Canada's largest city. Challenges and strategies discussed included the importance of early sport exposure, building partnerships with schools, developing player commitment, supporting athletes during the transition into adulthood, and building sustainable programs that encourage regeneration. Although opportunities and challenges presented in this chapter may be perceived as specific to rugby or Canadian sports, it is believed they speak to broader youth sport trends in urban settings. As such, we outline some preliminary practical implications that may be of interest to other sports clubs and community based organizations

with similar structures and participation trends, when developing their strategies for youth programming.

First, in order to assure early entrance into sport, it is essential that programming is local, affordable and accessible. Community clubs should focus their efforts on increasing their child and youth programming to a wider audience, which could be achieved in part by increasing engagement with community parents. For example, clubs could provide “open days” in local areas, where parents are encouraged to learn about the club and sport. Community sport clubs should also actively engage with local elementary and secondary schools to encourage school athletes to join community clubs, so when they are faced with a major life transition, such as graduating formal education, they are more likely continue with the sport in later years. For clubs that do not have capacity to provide schools with head coaches, it is recommended that they consider alternative ways to engage with schools, by offering to train teachers and providing guest coaching appearances and special skills sessions. As community sport clubs often struggle with human resources (e.g., volunteers), it is recommended they provide leadership opportunities for their young members, by funding coaching and refereeing certification and offering young players opportunities to coach lower age groups. This could not only increase coaching capacities within the club, but facilitate players’ commitment to their sport through their leadership roles. It is also common for clubs to struggle financially; it is recommended that clubs build partnerships with local organizations that aim to increase accessibility to sports programs for children and youth, as they may be able to provide funding for membership, equipment/facilities and athletes’ coaching certification; corporate sponsors and alumni may also be appropriate sources of financial support junior programming. Finally, it is essential for community clubs to develop strategic plans that not only address the current season, but provide

a vision for the next 5-10 years. Junior and senior administrators should work in collaboration to ensure that initiatives are aligned with the club's priorities and allocation of resources. By developing a forward thinking strategic plan, young players will be able to better move through the system, and in turn take on additional leadership roles within the club's administration.

The experiences of the community club administrators presented in this chapter reinforce and extend previous work highlighting the important role of community sport clubs as partners in the processes of sport development and continued participation (Collins & Buller, 2000; De Knop, et al., 1995; Lim et al., 2011). Administrators' insights also align closely with Green's (2005) suggestions for building sport programs that optimize athlete recruitment and retention; community clubs play a critical role at the base of the pyramid model for sport development, in particular, by providing opportunities for mass participation. While findings in this chapter present many strategies for more effective delivery of sport opportunities for all children and youth, many challenges must be overcome to effectively move this model forward; these issues must continue to be recognized, discussed, and addressed by stakeholders at all levels from club through to sport governing bodies and policy makers.

General Discussion

For over two decades, sport participation in Canada has been declining, particularly amongst athletes aged 15-24 years (Statistics Canada, 2010). This decrease in participation is a major concern, as broad-based participation is the foundation of sport development by which children and youth are introduced to sport, and elite athletes are identified and developed (Green, 2005). Although a considerable amount of research has provided insight into the development pathways for recreational participation and elite performance (e.g., *DMSP*, Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2011; *Development Model of Transitions Faced by Athletes*, Wyllemann & Lavallee, 2004; *LTAD*, Canadian Sport Institute, 2014), pathways for continued participation in competitive sport at a non-elite level has been understudied. In addition, there is limited research that explores the role of stakeholders (e.g., community sport clubs, schools and sport organizations) in supporting athletes through these pathways. This study explored the role of community sport clubs in facilitating sport participation, with a specific focus on the transition from youth to adult sport, as many athletes discontinue participating in competitive sports following graduation from formal education (Lim et al., 2011; Lunn, 2010; Tammelin et al., 2003). This research examined this topic from two different perspectives – the athletes and the community sport club administrators', providing comprehensive insight into how community sport clubs support young athletes to continue playing during this major life and athletic transition.

Early Entrance into Sport

As the athletes were encouraged to be physically active by their parents and played a wide range of sports in childhood and in early adolescence, this study supports the notion that early exposure to sport through parental involvement, a family's socioeconomic position, and

sport options for children can influence long-term commitment and achievement in sport (Clark, 2008; Côté, 1999; Green, 2005; Hirvensalo & Lintunen, 2011; Holt et al., 2011; Jakobsson et al., 2012; Lunn, 2010; Richards et al., 2007; Santos et al., 2004; Tammelin et al., 2003; White & McTeer, 2012; Yang et al., 1996). Although increasing participation amongst children was highlighted as a priority for many of the community sport clubs, most struggled to attract interest of parents outside of the rugby community as most of their under-12 and under-14 players were children of ex-players and current members of the club. As this study was conducted in Canada's largest city, socio-cultural factors relating to urban centers (e.g., safety and the lack of accessible and affordable sporting facilities and programs) may have acted as a barrier for sport participation, especially for marginalized communities (Edwards & Tsouros, 2006; Gordon-Larsen et al., 2006; Moore et al., 2010)

These findings suggest several potential implications to increase broad based sport participation. First, it appears it would be beneficial for community sport clubs to widen their scope for recruitment outside sport-specific circles, to include all families within the local community and to provide programming that is accessible. Previous research has suggested community clubs could improve engagement with parents by running introductory session for parents to attend, which may increase their knowledge of the sport and familiarity with the program (Eime & Paine, 2009). In addition, it would be valuable for more sports to be introduced in elementary schools, to provide students with the confidence to try-out for more competitive sports programs in middle and secondary school.

Also of considerable interest is that although the athletes sampled various sports and physical activities as children they only began playing rugby in late adolescence, yet the administrators recommended that rugby should be introduced in early childhood. This raises the

question of whether specializing in sport in childhood directly influences continued participation later in life. Although it has been cautioned that early specialization in childhood can lead to drop-out (Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2011; Wall & Côté, 2007), it has been suggested that sports programs that focus on specialization in early childhood should focus on sport-specific practice, games and play activities that encourage fun and enjoyment, rather than developing athletic fitness through intense training, which can impact an athlete's intrinsic motivation to continue participating (Wall & Côté, 2007). These conflicting perspectives of athletes and administrators are worthy of further investigation to gain more clarity in understanding of multiple optimal sport development trajectories that may exist. In particular, it appears that sport development models (e.g. *DMSP*, Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2011; *Development Model of Transitions Faced by Athletes*, Wyllemann & Lavalley, 2004; *LTAD*, Canadian Sport Institute, 2014) may focus primarily on administrators' perspectives of optimal developmental paths for elite or non-elite performance, but may not recognize the reality of actual sport trajectories of athletes who continue participating in sport at a competitive but non-elite level. Further research should also focus on optimal training and socialization practices among this alternate stream of participation. It is also recommended that additional research be conducted to further explore if and how early introduction to sport may influence a lifelong commitment to the sport.

School-Club Partnerships

Although time availability, personal commitments (e.g., work), socio-economic status, and educational attainment (Freysinger & Ray, 1994; Lim et al., 2011; Lunn, 2010; Tammelin et al., 2003) have been highlighted as major barriers to continued participation as young athletes transition into adulthood, many discontinue participating due to a lack of awareness of competitive sports programs outside of the school setting (Lim et al., 2011). This research

supports the notion that strong partnerships between sport providers such as local schools and community sport clubs can assist athletes' continued participation in competitive organized sports within the community (Collins & Buller, 2000; Eime & Payne, 2009), as most of the athletes were encouraged to join community sport clubs through their secondary school programs and were unaware of this pathway prior to being introduced to it. Within the current climate of decreased funding for sport in both school and community sport programs, strong partnerships may initially appear challenging, but may also offer opportune circumstances for such partnerships to develop. Given findings showing coaches have a significant influence on athletes' continued participation in sport, there is benefit in community sport clubs reaching out to local schools, by providing coaching support, as school coaches who are affiliated with a club, would be more likely to promote community sport clubs as a pathway for continued participation. For schools that have teacher coaches who are not affiliated with a club, clubs could provide coaches with information on local programming, so that coaches could in turn share this information with players, encouraging continued participation; however, findings highlighted that lack of volunteers often limited a club's ability to provide coaching support to schools and some administrators raised concerns about the sustainability of community volunteer coaches long-term. Another strategy that may be effective in increasing school to club transition may be clubs' focus on recruitment of influential players and encouraging alumni to coach at their former schools with the intention of drawing new players to the club, as positive relationship with peers can influence an athlete's continued participation in activities (Ullrich-French & Smith, 2009). In summary, findings suggest school-club partnerships may be a critical area for focused strategic attention moving forward, to enhance continued sport participation into adulthood.

Seamless Transitioning within Community Clubs

While graduation from secondary school is a major crossroad for many, administrators also highlighted their concerns that young athletes are not transitioning from junior to the senior programs because they are intimidated to advance to higher levels of competition, which was an issue also highlighted by Green (2005). The athletes in this study revealed that encouragement from coaches and team mates and opportunities to play, train, and socialize with the senior development team while still a junior player all had positive influences on their transition to the senior program. However, the administrators admitted that strategies for youth development could be greatly improved, as they needed to increase the amount of young athletes advancing through the system. For example, many clubs did not have long-term development plans established and mainly ran advancement initiatives on an ad-hoc basis. As well, some administrators highlighted that their junior and senior programs work in isolation, which can lead to a lack of communication when transitioning players. Collectively, these findings highlight the need for continued research focused on transitioning, particularly following secondary education, with further examination of processes and mechanisms of optimal support. Recommendations emerging from this study include more deliberate collaboration between age groups and levels of sport participation, focused on advancing and continuing players' development. This could include assigning an administrative position to this area (e.g., watching and providing feedback at training and games and encouraging them to join the senior development team), and placing greater focus on communication between junior and senior coaches and athletes.

Building Commitment: Balancing Competitive and Social Sport

Although community sport clubs can provide pathways for continued participation from junior to senior levels, it can be very intimidating for young athletes to join new programs, as

they are often challenged with re-socialization and having to learn new skills and concepts (Green, 2005). Findings highlighted it was essential that community sport clubs provided athletes with an environment that was welcoming, supportive and social, which in turn encouraged players to return again after their first experience. Factors influencing the athletes' involvement in community sport clubs align with Scanlan et al.'s (1993) sport commitment model, which suggests sport enjoyment, involvement opportunities, personal investment and social support positively influence continued sport participation. In particular, many athletes continued participating with community sport clubs because they found it offered a balance between competitive and social sport, which satisfied their need for personal development (i.e., skills and fitness) and enjoyment (i.e., fun and social environment). These findings speak to the importance of community sport clubs providing programming that satisfies a range of competencies and interests, particularly at this critical stage of transitioning out of secondary education, as such opportunities allow athletes to build a sense of identity and belonging, which can in turn influence their decision to continue. Findings suggest initiatives such as social events, providing branded clothing and equipment and utilizing social media are all effective strategies in developing commitment amongst young athletes, which aligns with past work showing social opportunities that encourage making friends, developing close relationships, and gaining recognition and social status all contribute to continued sport participation (Allen, 2004).

Mentorship and Regeneration

Lastly, this study highlighted the importance of athletes' continued involvement in sport, as experienced players are essential for mentoring the next generation of athletes advancing through the system (Canadian Sport Institute, 2014). As such, it is important for community sport clubs to provide flexibility in programming, allowing athletes to remain involved, even if

their commitment levels change. For example, many community clubs in this study ran multiple teams, enabling athletes of all skill and commitment levels to continue participating. Community sport club administrators spoke to the value of senior players as mentors to young athletes, the importance of senior players becoming involved with the sport in roles outside of being a player, and of gradually encouraging players' introduction of administrative roles and certification as coaches and/or referees. Administrators in this study recommended subsidizing training and certification and providing young athletes with opportunities to gain experience in a leadership role (i.e., coaching younger age groups, refereeing games and taking on administrative tasks), while many of the athletes were already involved in coaching and administration and most intended to fully transition into these roles once their playing years were over. Administrators, in addition to some athletes, spoke to the value of this strategy in increasing club resources, assisting in developing strong relationships within the community, and providing opportunities to develop athletes' commitment to the sport and club, beyond their playing years. In a time of numerous financial and resources constraints, initiatives and intervention studies encouraging further understanding of how to optimize mentorship for regeneration may be invaluable to player retention and transitioning/advancement.

Summary and Conclusion

Athlete entrance/recruitment, retention, and advancement are challenges for sport administrators at all levels, as athletes are often faced with various life and athletic transitions, which can lead to a decline or even a drop-out in sport participation (Freysinger & Ray, 1994; Lim et al., 2011; Lunn, 2010; Tammelin et al., 2003). Sport involvement amongst young Canadians is a particular concern, given the significant decline in participation amongst 15-24 year olds over the past two decades (Statistics Canada, 2012), which is around the time that

athletes graduate from formal education. Although a considerable amount of research has explored the factors influencing young athletes' entrance and continued participation in sport leading to the key sport participation and development models, there is lack of research on how sport providers support pathways for sport development. This research explored the role of community sport clubs in facilitating sport participation, with a specific focus on the transition from youth to adult sport; this was achieved by examining a) athletes' perspectives of the psychosocial factors that influenced their initial involvement and continued participation on a community sport club and b) the administrators' perspectives of the role of community clubs in facilitating sport development and the continuity of sport participation into adulthood.

This research project found that early exposure and access to sport provided opportunities for athletes' awareness and initial involvement with community clubs; however, many barriers continue to exist which may limit such opportunities (e.g., socio-economic status, proximity to training facilities in large urban centres). The value of strong school-club partnerships, and particularly coaches' and peers influences, was also highlighted as a critical factor in facilitating athletes' continued involvement, yet administrators often struggled to establish such a relationship, given already stretched volunteer human resources. Further, in order to build sport commitment and club loyalty, clubs played an important role in developing strategies and initiatives to assure a seamless transition between junior and senior sport, and create the optimal sport context that balanced the competitive and social elements of sport. Finally, administrators emphasized the importance of regeneration plans, which included opportunities for mentorship and leadership between more and less experience players, while athletes discussed their intention to remain involved in the sport beyond their roles as athletes. Although this research advances our understanding of how athletes can be supported to continue participation through major life

and athletic transitions, more research must be conducted within different sporting environments (e.g., different sport types, levels of competition, geographical settings, cultures etc.) to ensure ongoing advancement and understanding of sport participation and development models, to in turn encourage lifelong participation in competitive sport.

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Appendix A: Survey Questions - Athletes

Thank you for agreeing to participate in our study. Your feedback will provide insight into factors that influence young athletes' continued participation in sports.

All information you supply during the research will be held in confidence (unless you choose otherwise), and your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research (unless you specify otherwise).

NOTE: To be eligible to participate in this study, you must currently be playing for a community sport club and must also have played this same sport in high school

Section 1: About You

1. What is your name?
2. What is your age?
3. What is your sex?
 - Male
 - Female
 - Other

Section 2: Childhood Sports Experience

4. At what age did you start participating in organized sports?
5. Prior to high school, what organized sports did you participate in?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alpine Skiing • Badminton • Baseball • Basketball • Cricket • Cross-Country • Curling • Field Hockey • Flag-Football • Football • Golf • Gymnastics • Hockey • Lacrosse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nordic Skiing • Rugby • Snowboarding • Soccer • Softball • Swimming • Table Tennis • Tennis • Track and Field • Ultimate Frisbee • Volleyball • Wrestling • Other
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6. Select if you were ever assigned any of the following roles when playing organized sports as a child (before high school):

- Captain
- Assistant Captain
- Co-Captain

7. What influenced you to play organized sports as a child (before high school)?

Section 3: High School Sports Participation

8. What inter-school sports did you compete in during high school:

Note – Inter-school is defined as playing against other schools

- None
- Lacrosse
- Alpine Skiing
- Nordic Skiing
- Badminton
- Rugby
- Baseball
- Snowboarding
- Basketball
- Soccer
- Cricket
- Softball
- Cross-Country
- Swimming
- Curling
- Table Tennis
- Field Hockey
- Tennis
- Flag-Football
- Track and Field
- Football
- Ultimate Frisbee
- Golf
- Volleyball
- Gymnastics
- Wrestling
- Hockey
- Other

9. Select if you were ever assigned any of the following roles when playing for your high school team:

- Captain
- Assistant Captain
- Co-Captain

10. What influenced you to play inter-school sports in high school?

Section 4: Post-Secondary School Sport Participation

11. Did you attend University or College?

- Yes
- No

12. If yes, select the inter-school sports you competed in:

Note: Inter-school is defined as competing against other schools

- None
- Alpine Skiing
- Badminton
- Baseball
- Basketball
- Cricket
- Cross-Country
- Curling
- Field Hockey
- Flag-Football
- Football
- Golf
- Gymnastics
- Hockey
- Lacrosse
- Nordic Skiing
- Rugby
- Snowboarding
- Soccer
- Softball
- Swimming
- Table Tennis
- Tennis
- Track and Field
- Ultimate Frisbee
- Volleyball
- Wrestling
- None
- Other

13. Select if you were ever assigned any of the following roles when playing for your college/university school team:

- Captain
- Co-Captain
- Assistant Captain

14. What influenced you to play inter-school sports in university/college?

Section 5: Community Sport Club Participation

We are interested in learning about your experience playing for a community sport club.

For the purpose of this study, all community sport clubs are defined as competitive sports organizations which play within a league structure and for which participants are a member of.

These clubs are played outside of the school structure and are likely regulated by a regional, provincial and/or national sporting association.

15. Select the sports you are currently competing in at the community sport club level

- Alpine Skiing
- Badminton
- Baseball
- Basketball
- Cricket
- Cross-Country
- Curling
- Field Hockey

- Flag-Football
- Football
- Golf
- Gymnastics
- Hockey
- Lacrosse
- Lacrosse
- Nordic Skiing
- Rugby
- Snowboarding
- Soccer
- Softball
- Swimming
- Table Tennis
- Tennis
- Track and Field
- Ultimate Frisbee
- Volleyball
- Wrestling
- None
- Other

16. Select if you were ever assigned any of the following roles when playing for community sport club:

- Captain
- Co-Captain
- Assistant Captain

17. What influenced you to play for a community sport club?

18. For the sports you played in high school and play currently as part of a community sport club...

- What are the top 3 reasons why you enjoy playing for your community sports clubs
- What are the top 3 reasons why you continue with the sport

Thank you for your participation in the survey. We will be in touch shortly with further details about your participation in the interview.

If you have any questions, please contact Lauren Wolman by email at lwolman@yorku.ca or by calling 647-705-1531

Appendix B: Survey Questions – Organizations

Thank you for agreeing to participate in our study. Your feedback will provide insight into factors that influence young athletes' continued participation in sports.

All information you supply during the research will be held in confidence (unless you choose otherwise), and your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research (unless you specify otherwise).

Section 1: About You

1. What is your name?
2. What is your sex?

Section 2: Your involvement in club sports

3. What is the sport you are involved administratively (including coaching) with at the club level?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alpine Skiing • Badminton • Baseball • Basketball • Cricket • Cross-Country • Curling • Field Hockey • Flag-Football • Football • Golf • Gymnastics • Hockey • Lacrosse • Nordic Skiing • Rugby • Snowboarding • Soccer • Softball • Swimming • Table Tennis • Tennis • Track and Field • Ultimate Frisbee | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volleyball • Waterpolo • Wrestling • Other |
|---|---|

4. What is the name of your current sports club?
5. What is your current role with the club you are a part of?
6. What other roles have you held within the club?
7. What age group do you assist with?

Section 3: Structure of your club

8. What age groups does your club run?
9. Is your club involved with coaching in local high schools?
10. What are the top 3 challenges your club faces when recruiting?
11. What are the top 3 challenges your club faces when trying to retain players?
12. What do you think are the top 3 reasons why members continue playing your club?

Thank you for your participation in the survey. We will be in touch shortly with further details about your participation in the interview. If you have any questions, please contact Lauren Wolman by email at lwolman@yorku.ca or by calling 647-705-1531

Appendix C: Interview Guide – Athletes

1. Introductions

Thank you

I want to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today

Introduce myself

My name is Lauren and I would like to talk to you about the sport/sport club you are involved with.

Introduce the purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the role of community sport clubs in facilitating the continuity of sport participation, with a particular focus on factors that influence high school student-athletes to play on community sports teams.

Your feedback will provide insight into factors that influence athletes' continued involvement in sport.

Tape recording

This interview is being digitally recorded because I don't want to miss any of your comments. I will also be taking some notes during the session.

Duration of the interview

This interview will usually take about an hour, but could take up to 2 hours.

Consent Form and Confidentiality

Before we start the interview, I kindly ask that you sign the following consent form, which details the confidentiality around this interview. Any information I include in my report will not identify you as a respondent. You don't have to talk about anything you don't want to and you may end the interview at any time.

Opportunity for questions

Do you have any questions so far?

2. Tell me about yourself and the sports you play.

3. How did you get involved in sports?

Prompts:

- Family Influence
- School Influence
- Out-of-school programs
- Personal interest

4. How did you get involved in playing for a community sport club?

Prompts:

- How did you hear about the club?
- Who brought you to the club (if any)?
- Were your parents supportive?

5. Describe to me what it was like to join your community sport club for the first time?

Prompts:

- How did you feel (emotionally)?
- What was the environment like? Was it welcoming?
- What did you like about the team?
- What level were you playing at when you first started?
- What made you want to come back / join?

6. What do you like most about your club?

Prompts:

- Access – location, cost
- Environment
- Coaching
- Level
- Opportunities

7. What motivates you to play your sport?

Prompts:

- Socialization
- Competition level
- Advancement opportunities
- Enjoyment

8. Are there key individuals who have influenced you in your sporting life? If so, who are they?
How have they influence you?

9. How long do you see yourself playing for your community sport club?

Prompts:

- Do you see yourself transitioning into being a coach or administrator?
- What do you think could lead you to stop playing on a community sport club?

10. You have probably seen players come and go from your club. What do you think is the main reason why other players drop-out?

11. What do you think clubs should be doing to help athletes continue participating in community sports, especially during the transition from high school to adulthood?

12. Closing Remarks

I want to thank you for your time today. Your insights will be valuable in helping us gain a better understanding of participation in your sport.

Do you have any question for me?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Again, thank you for participating in the interview. If you feel that you want to add anything after we leave today, please feel free to contact me.

Appendix D: Interview Guide – Organizations

Section 1: Introduction

Thank you

I want to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today.

Introduce myself

My name is Lauren and I would like to talk to you about the sport/sport club you are involved with.

Introduce the purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the role of community sport clubs in facilitating the continuity of sport participation, with a particular focus on factors that influence high school student-athletes to play on community sports teams.

Your feedback will provide insight into factors that influence athletes' continued involvement in sport.

Recording

This interview is being digitally recorded because I don't want to miss any of your comments. I will also be taking some notes during the session.

Duration of the interview

This interview will usually take about an hour, but could take up to 2 hours.

Consent Form and Confidentiality

Before we start the interview, I kindly ask that you sign the following consent form, which details the confidentiality around this interview. Any information I include in my report will not identify you as a respondent. You don't have to talk about anything you don't want to and you may end the interview at any time.

Opportunity for questions

Do you have any questions so far?

Section 2: Sport/Club Structure

1. You mentioned you are the (position) – tell me a little about the role within the club and your involvement in rugby....

Prompts:

- a. What does your role entail?
- b. How long have you been with the club
- c. Did you play rugby?

- d. How did you get involved with the club?
2. As I am sure all clubs are organized differently, I was wondering if you could describe your club structure
 - a. What level does your club play?
 - b. What is the club environment like? Are you a social or competitive club?
 - c. Do the teams all train together at the same field on the same days?
 3. You mentioned that your club runs youth programming. Can you describe to me the program?
 - a. How it is structured?
 - b. What are the club's key priorities for your youth program?
 - i. Do you feel you are meeting these priorities? How?

Section 3: Recruitment

4. How do you recruit youth players to your club?

Prompts:

 - a. Do you have a formal plan for youth recruitment? If so, tell me about it.
 - i. Who leads on recruitment
 - ii. Who recruits junior players for your club? (coaches, players, alumni)
 - iii. Do you have any formal recruitment activities that you run?
 - b. Where do you draw youth players from?
 - i. Schools
 - ii. Players (recruiting children)
 - iii. Other?
5. Do you have any formal processes for welcoming new players, especially youth?
 - a. How can the experience be improved?
 - b. Is this process different for youth and adults?
6. Do you think your club's recruitment strategy for youth is effective?
 - a. How can it be improved?
 - b. You mentioned that XXX were challenges that your club is facing with regards to recruitment, how do you think your club can overcome these challenges?
7. Do you find a lot of your junior players continue with your club once you have recruited them?
 - a. What are the reasons why they leave the junior program?

Section 4: Retention

8. You mentioned xxx were reasons why members continue playing your club, can you elaborate on this?
 - a. How does the club facilitate this?
9. Do you find that many of your junior players are transitioning to your senior team?
 - a. How does your club help facilitate this transition?
 - b. Does this impact your retention of players?
 - a. How can this transition be improved?
10. How does your club support players who want to advance to a higher competitive level (e.g. representative).
 - a. Does your club have pathways for young players advancing to higher competitive levels?
 - b. Does this impact your retention of players?
11. At what age do you see young players stop continuing to play?
 - a. Why do they stop playing?
 - b. How does your club support players during this transition and help encourage them to play?
 - c. How do you think your club can reduce the drop-out?
12. You mentioned xxxx, xxxx, and xxx as challenges your club faces when retaining players. Can you please elaborate on these? (only ask this if the factors were not brought up in the earlier questions)
 - a. Are they different for youth and adult players?

Section 6: Closing Remarks

Before we end, would you like to comment on any other recommendations to facilitate better transitions from high school to community sport?

I want to thank you for your time today. Do you have any other question for me?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Again, thank you for participating in the interview. If you feel that you want to add anything after we leave today, please feel free to contact me.

Appendix E: Informed Consent Form Template

Date: April 2013

Study Name: Exploring the continuity of sport participation into adulthood: The role of community sport clubs in the sport development process

Researchers: Lauren Wolman, Masters Candidate and Dr. Jessica Fraser-Thomas, Assistant Professor, York University, School of Kinesiology and Health Science

Purpose of the Research: This research will explore the role of community sport clubs in facilitating the continuity of sport participation, with a particular focus on psychosocial factors that influence high school student-athletes to play on adult community sports teams.

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research: Participate in a short survey and interview. It is estimated that the study will require a maximum of 2 hours of your time.

Risks and Discomforts: We do not foresee any risks or discomfort from your participation in the research.

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You: It is expected that findings will provide insight into factors that influence athletes' entrance and longevity in sports, enabling community sport clubs to adopt best practices for sport development.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence the nature of your relationship with York University either now, or in the future.

Withdrawal from the Study: You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researchers, York University, or any other group associated with this project. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

Confidentiality: Unless you choose otherwise, all information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. The data will be collected using an online survey, a digital recording device, and handwritten notes. Data will be safely stored in a locked facility and /or on a password protected computer and only the primary researcher and her supervisor will have access to this information. Data will be filed for four years and will subsequently be destroyed. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

Questions About the Research? If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact Lauren Wolman telephone at (647)705-1531 or by e-mail (lwolman@yorku.ca). This research has been reviewed and approved by the Human

Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, York Research Tower, York University (telephone 416-736-5914 or e-mail ore@yorku.ca).

Legal Rights and Signatures:

I _____, consent to participate in the study: *Exploring the continuity of sport participation into adulthood: The role of community sport clubs in the sport development process* conducted by Lauren Wolman. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature
Participant

Date

Signature
Principal Investigator

Date